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APRIL 2019

The
Experts
Issue
2019



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The Spirit of Travel



LOUIS VUITTON



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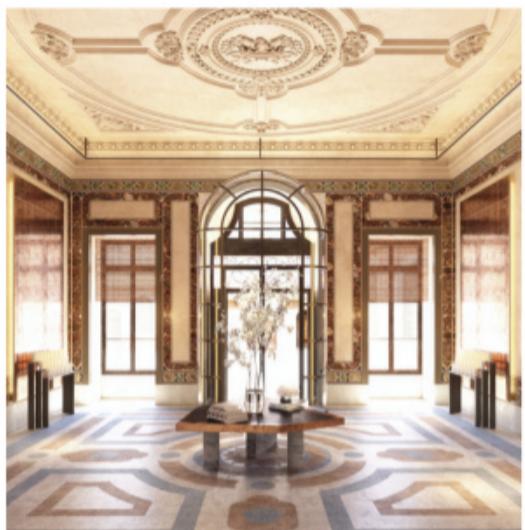
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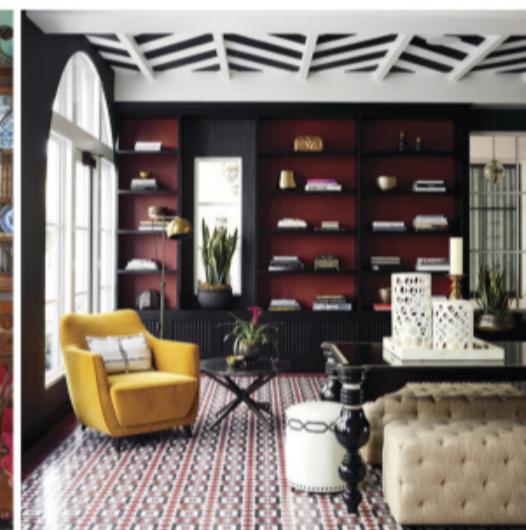
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WE PICK THE MOST RESPECTED EXPERTS, INCLUDING JALSA URUBSHUROW, ABOVE, WHO TAP INTO THEIR INSIDER KNOWLEDGE TO ORGANIZE THE BEST TRIPS AROUND THE WORLD. SEE THE FULL LIST OF NAMES AT CNTRAVELER.COM/ TRAVEL-SPECIALISTS

ON THE COVER



A SURFER IN MALIBU,
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JACK JOHNS

FOR THE SHARPEST ADVICE
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THE EDITOR'S LETTER



IN INDIA RECENTLY I gave a man a word. His name was Balveez, and he worked for the bus company whose services we were using to get from Udaipur airport to the city. Balveez, with his very definite side part—as if his hair was having an unresolvable argument—said he would like one day to return to his farm and work the land alongside buffalo, cows, and goats. He planned to open a camp there so visitors from all over the world could come and stay with him and see how he and his family live. Until then, he is making money shuttling guests to and fro and is keen to improve his English. I could feel, even though he was sitting two rows away, that his head was turned entirely toward me like an owl's, unblinking, waiting for me to say something.

"I have many Australians, Canadians, and Americans on this bus," he said, "all speaking English, but they use lots of curious phrases, and there are so many different singsongs in their voices. I would very much like to learn as many new words as possible." We arrived at Lake Pichola. Boats were chugging around the moody blue water, a thrush was singing, the Taj Lake Palace looked smaller than I remembered it, and whiter.

"I'll give you a word. It's a good word for India, but one of my favorites anyway," I said. "The word is 'mesmerizing.' It means wondrous, captivating, like you can't take your eyes off it even for a second." "Mesmerizing," he said, raising his eyebrows. "I like it." "And when you come back to pick us up," I responded, "you must give me a great Hindi word in exchange."

Is India a trick? One day I saw a huge tree in the middle of a forest covered in snowy egrets; they were resting so quietly in the branches I thought they were laundry hung out to dry in the wilderness. On the streets of Jaipur we met a man with eyeteeth longer than his fingers. Everywhere we went there were peacocks shrugging their tailed ball gowns in the dust like the party would never be over. One evening we feasted on *thali* in an old temple in the middle of an okra field and heard a leopard hunting a deer in the dark. Suddenly there was a gust of wind, and the candles all around us were snuffed out like a slap. The intense, dense pitter-patter of rain pocked the ground, scattering us all in seconds: lute player, leopard, ladies piled high with wheat after a long day in the fields. Another time, I hugged an elephant. The mahout pointed at me and told me to hold my cheek next to the elephant's cheek, then to wrap my arm around its trunk. It was very still and very warm. Its flesh felt like burnt sausage. I sensed my heart glass immediately start filling and then spilling, as if a tap in it had just burst open.

This is the new issue of *Condé Nast Traveler*, for those who are very keen to hear what Balveez's word is, but who know, really, that they have exactly the word they need already.

MELINDA STEVENS
EDITOR IN CHIEF



THE EXPERTS' SHOPPING HACKS

THIS MONTH WE ASKED A SERIES OF WORLDLY TRAVELERS WHAT THEY LOVE TO BRING BACK FROM AFAR:



MICHAEL KORS

"IN THE HAMPTONS, YOU'LL FIND GORGEOUS THROWS AND PILLOWS AT HOMENATURE IN SOUTHAMPTON, AND TIINA THE STORE IN AMAGANSETT HAS AMAZING DESIGN ACCESSORIES."



SIMONE ROCHA

"I love Tokyo's energy and the little side streets with their old shop fronts. You can get brilliant functional household pieces in Tokyu Hands; I buy Japanese knives from Aritsugu; and Daikanyama Tsutaya is great for new and old photo books."

YOTAM OTTOLENGHI

"The market in the Old City of Akko in Israel sells everything from teapots to the most delicious hummus.

With its ancient buildings and salty sea air, it's like stepping back in time."



BELLA HADID

"ONE OF MY FAVORITE SPOTS IN ROME IS THE MERCATO MONTI FOR ONE-OFF VINTAGE CLOTHES."

FOR MORE TIPS FROM OUR EXPERTS ON THEIR BEST-KEPT SHOPPING SECRETS AROUND THE GLOBE, CHECK OUT THE BLUE BANDS THROUGHOUT THE ISSUE

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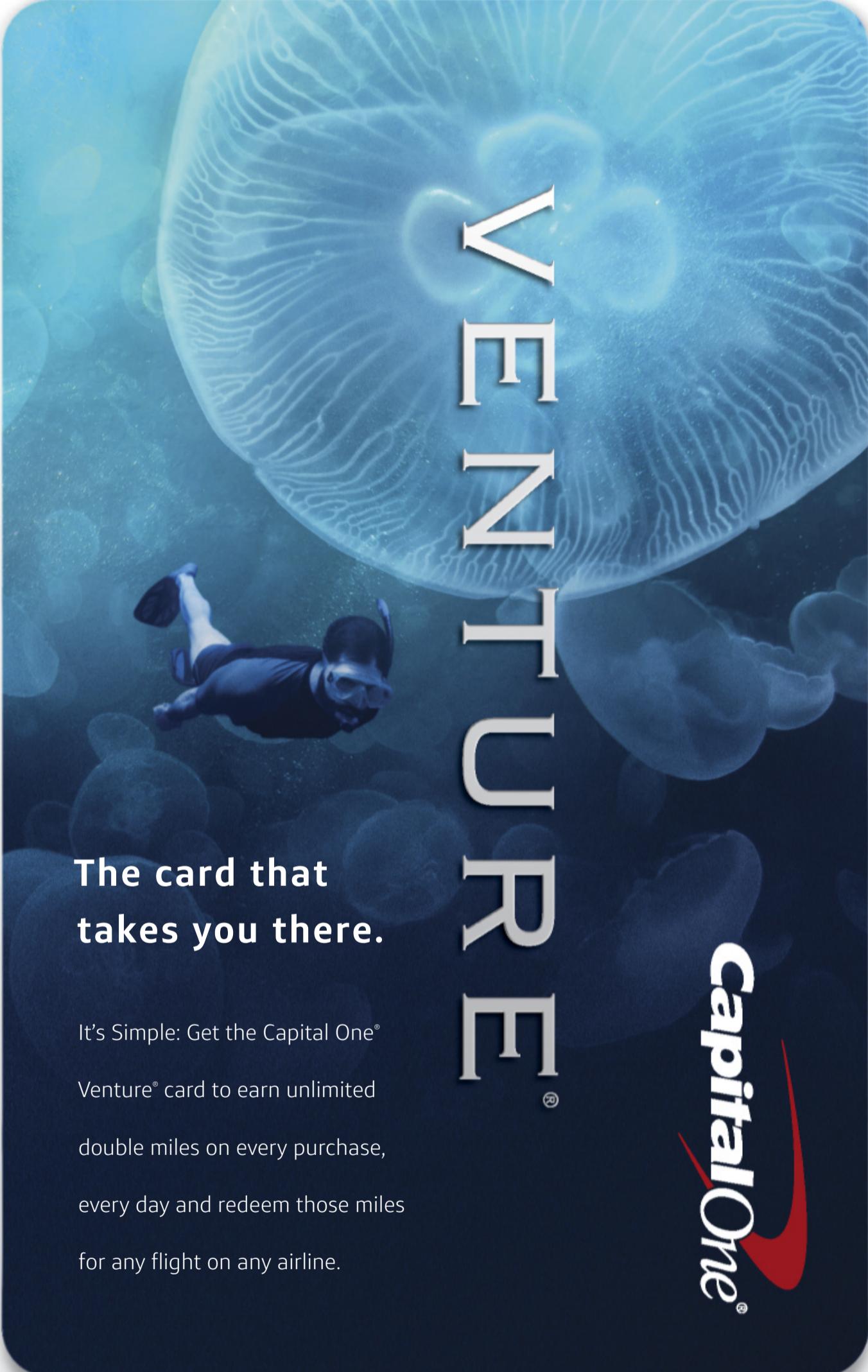
A woman with long red hair, wearing a dark blue sequined dress, swims gracefully through the ocean. She is surrounded by several large sea turtles, some of which have green, flowing fabric draped over them. The background shows the surface of the water with sunlight filtering down. The overall atmosphere is dreamlike and ethereal.

DREAM IN CAYMAN.

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THE EXPERTS ISSUE

THE NEW PRIVATE-ISLAND JUNGLE ESCAPE



The Gulf of Chiriquí, off of Panama's Pacific coast, has always been a draw for hard-core divers and sport fishermen.

It's one of the few places on earth that still feel "unexpected" in the truest sense, with dense rain forests and deep blue waters filled with wildlife. In the past year, two sustainably minded micro-resorts have brought serious luxury to the area, all while trying to leave as few footprints as possible on the surrounding environment. Isla

Palenque (shown) sits at the tip of an island just off the mainland town of Boca Chica, where guests have their run of a 400-acre untamed jungle and seven beaches. The entire hotel is made up of eight casitas and a villa that sleeps 14, with rooms opening up onto their own private stretch of sand. It's the launch point for spending an afternoon casting for red snapper on tricked-out fishing boats and cruising over to Coiba National Park to dive with

sharks at one of the biggest coral reefs in the eastern Pacific. Fifteen miles farther offshore, there's the even more ambitious Islas Secas, an entire archipelago owned by conservationist Louis Bacon. One main pavilion is for drinks and dinner, with a constellation of one-, two-, and three-bedroom setups scattered around a peninsula.

There are 14 uninhabited islets, where you can be left for a few hours with a well-stocked picnic, paddleboards, and snorkeling gear laid out by the hotel's intuitive staff. The untouched part does require a trek, though:

From Panama City, it's a short flight to the regional hub of David, then about two hours of combined car and boat transit before you actually arrive. But it's worth it. There won't be a condo (or, frankly, another person) in sight.

ANDREA WHITTLE *Isla Palenque rates start at \$500; islapalenque.com; Islas Secas rates start at \$1,000; islassecas.com*

Clockwise from right:
Del Mar; the
Temple House;
Officina; shellfish
at Del Mar



THE CHINESE TRENDSETTER

AN ALTERNATIVE CITY LEADS THE WAY

Chengdu's tourist lure has traditionally centered on two clichés: hot pot and giant pandas (the largest captive population in the world is in the Sichuan capital). Yet this is exactly where to also glimpse New China. Its residents have a reputation for being both laid back and cosmopolitan—it was on the Silk Road, after all, and became China's western commerce hub. An added asset: the location, more than 1,000 miles from the prying eyes of Beijing, has afforded it an unlikely autonomy. For example, in a country where the LGBTQ population is often invisible, Chengdu is a rare, rainbow-colored exception. Come here to experience the cutting edge of contemporary Chinese culture and the city's indie boutiques, like the months-old Kerry RC, which are more adventurous than their coastal counterparts. Several of them smartly use their Chengdunese outposts as a divining rod for homegrown trends: What locals buy today will impact what the Shanghai pick up next season. Rents can be a third cheaper than in Shanghai or Beijing, which means independent creatives flourish (the oddly named Eastern Suburb Memory complex has an impressive roster of fashion and art). Stay at the Temple House, whose wooden pavilions and stone towers embody Chengdu's ancient/modern dichotomy, and do cocktails at The Bridge, a Neri&Hu-designed bar and restaurant inside a converted walkway that marries old and new in a way this city excels at. MARK ELLWOOD

THE CAPITAL'S FRESH SCENE

D.C. IS REVVING UP AS AN ARTS AND FOOD HUB

In a city once awash in conservative navy pinstriped suits and white-linen-tablecloth restaurants, a wave of international tastemakers has woken up everything from restaurants to nightlife, and even its hotels. In April, the blossoming cherry trees gifted by Japan paint the National Mall creamy pink and the spring sunshine means you can walk everywhere, from the monuments over to The Wharf, the city's refurbished southwest waterfront. That's where to find the fine-dining Spanish restaurant Del Mar, by James Beard Award-winning chef Fabio Trabocchi, and the casual Italian Officina, by Nicholas Stefanelli (stick around for a nightcap at its hidden Salotto). It's also home to Anthem, a David Rockwell-designed music venue from the same people behind D.C.'s legendary 9:30 club—if here for the Kenny Chesney show later this month, stop into edgy cocktail-maker Todd Thrasher's raucous Tiki TNT around the corner for last call. In the funky U Street/Cardozo area is Maydan, a North African-meets-Middle Eastern restaurant that is always packed with a cool crowd (word is the Obamas like to pop in for date night). And in more traditional pockets of Northwest D.C., new hotels lend a hipster edge to a space once dominated by chintz and brocade. Eaton Workshop opened in October, giving young travelers more than just stylish hotel rooms—it has a wellness center, recording studio, and social programming right on the lobbying hub of K Street. Herzog & de Meuron brought their signature spare-but-art-driven aesthetic to the newly opened Conrad, in CityCenterDC, while Martin Brudnizki just redesigned the bar and restaurant at the Dupont Circle. Next month also brings back one of the city's hottest attractions: The International Spy Museum reopens in a new location, at L'Enfant Plaza, with 140,000 square feet showcasing the world's foremost collection of international espionage artifacts. It's a few blocks from the Mall, and it reminds us that even alongside the traditional monuments there are more unexpected, on-the-pulse reasons to have D.C. on your radar. CORINA QUINN



PHOTOGRAPH: NICOLE FRANZEN

THE SHOPPING HACK "CLIGNANCOURT FLEA MARKET, IN PARIS, WHERE I PICKED UP A LAMP BY ARTIST JACQUES DUVALBRASSEUR." INTERIOR DESIGNER KELLY WEARSTLER



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This page, clockwise: Watchman cabins at Blackberry Mountain; a cabin interior; a seating area; roasted beets over an open fire. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Chickpeas and tuna confit served at Firetower restaurant; overnight camping; Goat Hill; a kitchen in one of the cabins; dishes of cauliflower, pumpkin, and carrots; lunch at Firetower



THE SOUTHERN TRAILBLAZER

BLACKBERRY MOUNTAIN REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

Probably the most holistic adventure-wellness setup in the country right now, Blackberry Mountain looks set to make the same heavyweight game-changing impact on the spa scene as its sister property, Blackberry Farm, did for feasting weekenders. “We’d been gazing at that mountain for years,” says Mary Celeste Beall. “It’s the first big peak you see from the porch at the Farm,” her family’s epicurean retreat in the foothills of Tennessee’s Great Smoky Mountains. Beall recounts the long, winding road to creating Blackberry Mountain: When the property came up for sale—eight square miles of steep, rugged wilderness, from lush rhododendron forests at the base to a wind-scarred rocky summit—the Bealls scooped it up. They set aside half the land for conservation. It took a decade to transform the remainder into a 36-room, 3,000-foot-high adventure playground, which welcomed its first guests in February. Blackberry Mountain takes the Farm’s winning formula—lazy grits-fueled lunches and mint juleps on the lawn—and flips it on its side. If the Farm is about sybaritic indulgence, the Mountain is about finding thrills in the pursuit of wellness—or wellness in the pursuit of thrills. Alongside trail biking, rock climbing, and morning hikes in search of waterfalls, there’s a harnessed ascent into the canopy of a century-old oak tree; weightless floating with aerial yoga; and foraging excursions for ramps and chanterelles. Unlike at the Farm, all guest cabins and cottages are freestanding, and all have wide-screen views of the Smokies stretching clear to the purple horizon. Forgo the duvet for a night and camp by starlight. It’s the most indulgent way to take in what this land has to offer, which is exactly the point. PETER JON LINDBERG





OTHER UPCOMING OUTDOOR RETREATS

HABITAS, NAMIBIA

This spring, at its second hotel, the fabulous hippie lifestyle brand will have its caftaned loyalists spying desert elephants during the day before evening cocktails around the fire.

ELEVEN EXPERIENCE, CHILE

In November, the Colorado-based adventure group behind Iceland's Deplar Farm and Bahama House, Harbour Island, will open seven suites along Rio Palena in the Andean Valley, a fly-fisher's dream for its hefty rainbow trout.

PEGASUS LODGES, AZORES

The cool surf company is now bringing wave seekers to Portugal's Atlantic archipelago with its newest retreat, which is reached by taking a 45-minute hike through São Jorge Island.



YOUR WORLD. YOUR WAY. *your moment.*

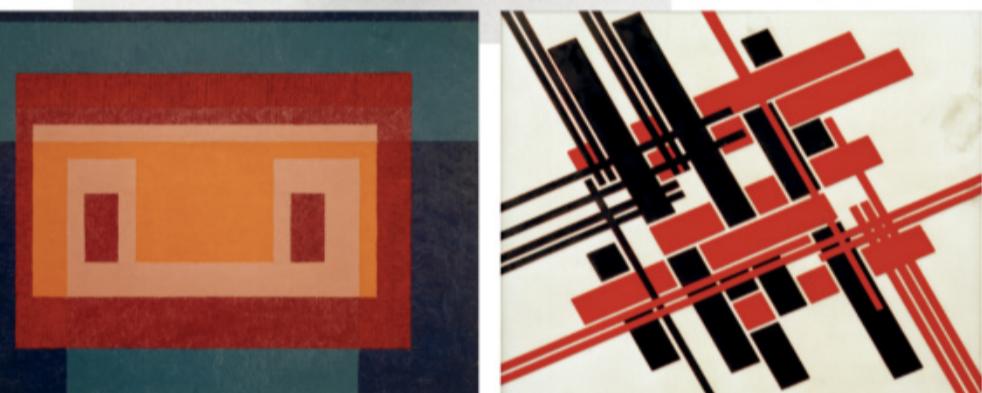
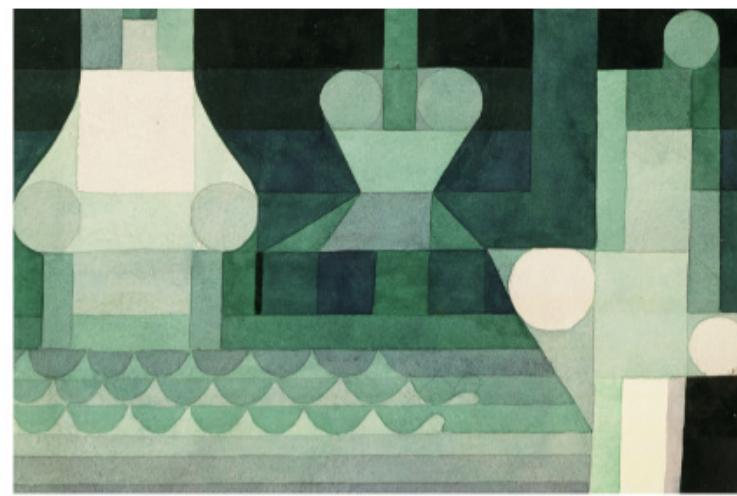
For some, it's sitting down to the first five-star dinner of the trip, and being transported by the rich, unexpected flavors awaiting you. For others, it's sailing into an exotic, remote port without another ship in sight. And for you, it's the little things. Discover your moment.

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The extraordinary roster of teachers included Kandinsky, Klee, and Albers, whose works are pictured here

THE ART POWERHOUSE

HOW GERMANY'S SHORT-LIVED BAUHAUS SCHOOL WENT ON TO DEFINE THE AESTHETIC OF A CENTURY

Born in April 1919 in the German city of Weimar, the Bauhaus was an innovative interwar arts school founded by architect Walter Gropius. In its short existence, it moved first to the emerging industrial city of Dessau (in 1925), then to Berlin (in 1932, where it was closed by the Nazis in 1933), and vaunted illustrious faculty and alumni, including Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Marcel Breuer, Josef and Anni Albers, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe—the school's third and final director. But how did a design academy

that lasted less than 14 years and taught no more than 1,250 students become so influential? As Mies van der Rohe said, “You can’t achieve that kind of resonance with either organization or propaganda. Only an idea has the power to spread so widely.” And the Bauhaus idea was to unite art and industry, form and function, placing equal emphasis on fine art (painting, sculpture), crafts, and manufacturing (architecture, textiles, ceramics, metalwork, joinery). Paradoxically, the school owes its lasting success in great part to the fact that it was shut down. Driven away by the Nazis, many of the Bauhaus’s architects and artists settled around the world and continued

to propagate its ideals, from Tel Aviv to Chicago. This year, Germany marks the school’s centenary with a packed program at the three Bauhaus locations and beyond. New Bauhaus museums are slated for both Weimar (opening April) and Dessau (September). The former will focus on the early period, while the latter will house the vast collection (some 49,000 works) of the Bauhaus Foundation. GIOVANNA DUNMALL bauhaus100.com

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THE LODGE MIGRATION

THE NATURE CAMP PIONEERED IN AFRICA IS NOW SPREADING ACROSS SOUTH AMERICA



700,000 Heures, Brazil

The third incarnation of Thierry Teyssier's nomadic hotel lands in Lençóis, in northeastern Brazil, this June. Not familiar with this coastal stretch of sand-duned wilderness dotted with emerald pools? It's been on the kitesurfing circuit for years. But with the six-month Teyssier residence, travelers can now stay in a bohemian cottage on the cusp of those undulating forms, horseback riding between lagoons, stopping for grilled fish, then kicking off nights with *caipiroskas* and dancing in the sands. 700000heures.com; price upon request

Corocora Camp, Colombia

Colombia's eastern savanna is a rugged rural area dense with rare flora and fauna (giant anteaters, capybaras) that has long been under the radar. But just-opened Corocora Camp is changing that. Canvas tents are kitted out with telescopes and large terraces from which to spy playful howler monkeys. Explore the marshes on horseback, track pumas, and grab a pair of binoculars to make out scarlet ibis soaring overhead in elegant wisps of red. corocoracamp.com; doubles from about \$490 per person (minimum two nights)

Kachi Lodge, Bolivia

The first and only hotel within the country's Uyuni salt flats is as remarkable as its surroundings, an expanse of striated salt crusts backed by the jagged Tunupa volcano. Futuristic white pods—the cool-hunter's semispherical shelter of choice—are set against this natural stage. Each geodesic dome has minimalist furniture and beds looking straight up at the skies through the transparent panels. Food is from an offshoot of La Paz's celebrated Gustu, served in a see-through tent, fueling morning bike rides on islands profuse with cacti. kachilodge.com; doubles from about \$1,980 per person for two nights

Cannúa, Colombia

This sustainable ecolodge near Medellín introduces travelers to the biodiversity of the Valle de San Nicolás, a home to the Muisca people before the conquistadors arrived. It was built using compressed soil from the lush hillside forest. Cabins have modern interiors and wide panoramas, but the sleek spa stands out with its floor-to-ceiling views of the valley. cannua.com; doubles from \$200

PAOLA SINGER



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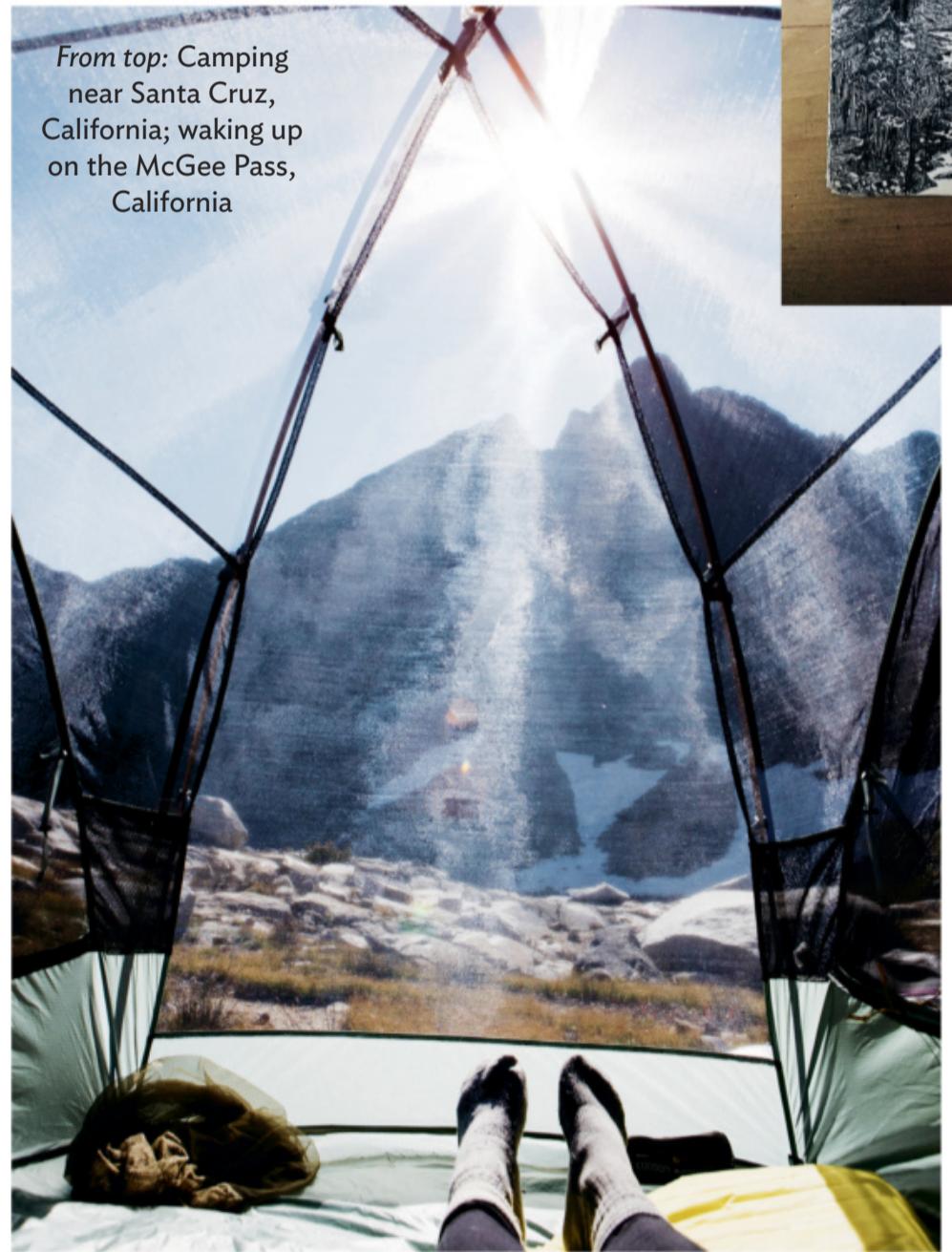
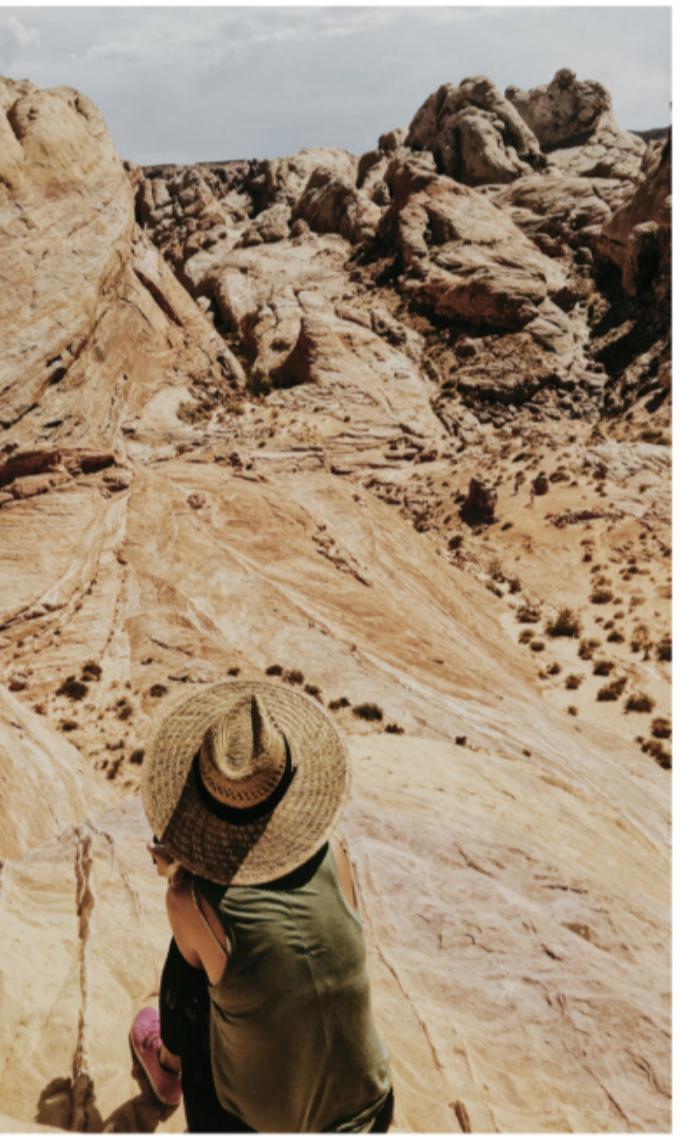
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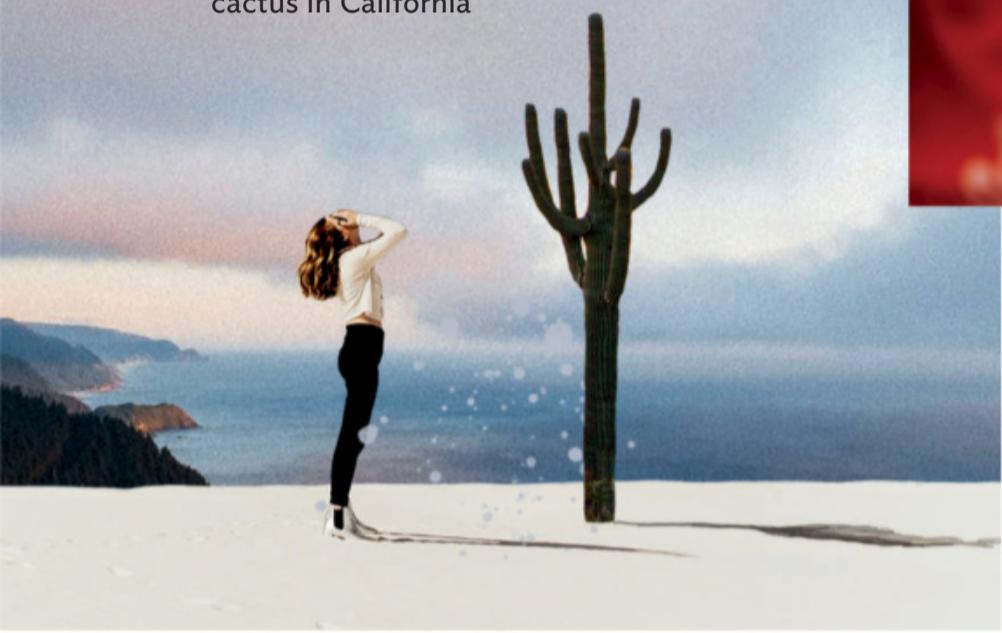


From top: Camping near Santa Cruz, California; waking up on the McGee Pass, California

From top: Franconia Notch State Park, New Hampshire; a vintage postcard; Valley of Fire State Park, Nevada; adventure photographer Irene Yee



Clockwise from above:
Touring Colorado in
a camper van; canyons
in Utah; on the road near
White Sands National
Monument, New Mexico;
a teddy bear cholla
cactus in California



THE FANTASY LIFESTYLE WILD GIRLS

NEW GROUPS OF WOMEN WITH PITCH-PERFECT
OUTDOOR SKILLS TAKE THEIR KNOW-HOW GLOBAL

SIX YEARS AGO, Stanford graduate Sasha Cox was backpacking through Bolivia with her boyfriend when a light bulb went off. "I realized that I had never been camping or hiking with my closest girlfriends. We would make dinner and go to the theater together, but spending time in nature had never even come up in conversation—which I thought was ridiculous, because it is the place that makes me feel like the strongest and the best version of myself," she explains. She returned home to California determined to make outdoor pursuits more accessible to women, setting up Trail Mavens the following year. Now she leads weekend camping and hiking expeditions throughout the U.S.

The past few years have seen a ton of female-run organizations spring up, tapping into a growing trend of empowered urbanites embracing their outdoorsy side. These tent-pitching, map-reading, fire-starting types are escaping the city grind for perspective-shifting physical challenges in their spare time, from scaling peaks at sunrise to kayaking rushing rapids. It's perhaps no coincidence that this movement is concentrated in the U.S. and the U.K. in an era of great uncertainty—what better way to shut out the political babble than a head-clearing hike along a knockout coastal path? ➤



► Anna McNuff, a former rower for Great Britain, launched Adventure Queens, a nonprofit women's network, in 2014 after quitting her job and cycling 11,000 miles solo across all 50 states. Now she gives advice on camping to the 7,000-strong official Facebook group. Natalie Bannister started Gutsy Girls when she moved to London after a few years in Portugal because she missed surfing and paddleboarding and wanted to set up a community where women could try new sporting activities. Now she organizes all-female weekend SUP retreats in Norway, cycling weeks in Mallorca, and surfing holidays in the Algarve. And Bex Band, a qualified mountain leader and former schoolteacher, set up Love Her Wild, organizing women-only expeditions after getting hooked on the 620-mile Israel National Trail three years ago.

Of course, you only have to type "19th-century female explorers" into Google to be reminded that women (Isabella Bird, Gertrude Bell) have been crossing deserts and climbing mountains for years. The difference is that while they were once seen as interlopers in a man's world, more recent pioneers like polar adventurer Rosie Stancer (who is currently planning the first female-led expedition to cross the length of the Taklamakan Desert in China) have paved the way for the next generation to become part of the conversation.

Another game changer was Cheryl Strayed's 2012 memoir, *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*. This month, author and photographer Gale Straub is releasing *She Explores*, a collection of 40 first-person tales from women inspired by their adventures. Highlights include Sarah Attar, one of Saudi Arabia's first female Olympic athletes, who runs the backcountry trails of California's eastern Sierras.

This movement is all about stretching boundaries, but often the real buzz comes from sharing those experiences with like-minded women. As Bannister says of her 70-mile Fjällräven Classic hike through Swedish Lapland, which she completed last year, "I wanted to see how far I could push my comfort levels; the mental challenge was being freezing cold in a tent and having to hike another 12 miles the next day. I was with this incredible group of women, and I knew they all had my back." EMMA LOVE

"She Explores: Stories of Life-Changing Adventures on the Road and in the Wild," by Gale Straub (Chronicle Books, \$25), is out on March 26

HOW TO SPOT THE SPECIES

THE SNOW-RESISTANT, WOODSMOKE-SELLING,
BMI-OPTIMIZED, GUNS-OF-STEEL CAN-DO CREW

Diurnal by nature, these muscular creatures rise wide-eyed before dawn, often inside ethical-down-filled Tundra sleeping bags on a mountainside or deep in a rust-colored canyon. Their agile movements can be tracked to the most extreme natural spaces on earth—scaling an ice shelf in Greenland, kayaking a Zambezi tributary—though a coastline path close to home will do. They conquer in packs of three or more, quick with a high-five or rallying cry. Fuel is 2,200 calories a day of cashew butter and power proteins; a whey Clif bar is zipped tight into the thigh pocket of thermodynamic Lululemon leggings. Phones stay off, save for the obligatory top-of-the-mountain Instagram snap, toned arms raised in triumph, endorphin-triggered grins across sweaty, happy faces.

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From top: Desert cacti; road-trip knitting in Alaska; near Mammoth Lakes in California's Sierras; redwood trees in Northern California



PHOTOGRAPHS: SARAH ATTAR; LAURA NAVAR; GRETCHEN POWERS; GALE STRAUB

THE SHOPPING HACK "IN MARATEA, ITALY, I BOUGHT A SEA-URCHIN CUTTER TO EAT THEM FRESH WITH A SQUEEZE OF LEMON." FILMMAKER ROMAN COPPOLA

Serenity in ancient olive groves

A VIEW OF THE MASSERIA TORRE MAIZZA, PUGLIA



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THE FORAGING ROAD TRIP CORNWALL COAST, ENGLAND

ON A WILD-FOOD-GATHERING ADVENTURE IN THE REGION THAT IS A KEY PLAYER IN THE FARM-TO-FORK



We arrived at the off-grid retreat Kudhva, near Trewarmett, under the cover of darkness. The campfire was crackling, and the scent of citrus and rosemary filled the air inside the barn.



I spotted this traditional Cornish house on the riverbank on the quick car ferry journey to the Roseland Peninsula. I can only imagine how hypnotic it must be having the water this close to your doorstep.



The Hidden Hut is a wooden shed subject to the harsh Atlantic elements on Porthcurnick Beach—and one of the best places to eat in the southwest. Chef Simon Stallard whips up seafood feasts over an open fire.



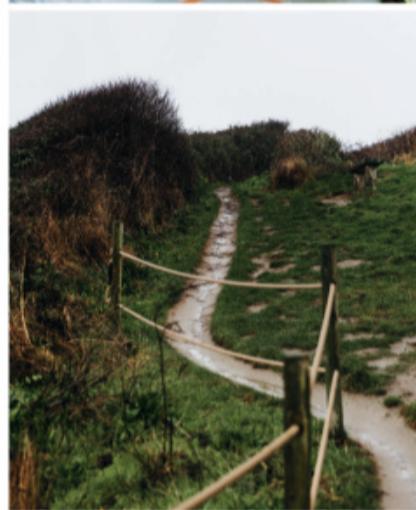
Squeezing through the winding narrow streets of the fishing village Port Isaac proved challenging, and the electric Range Rover certainly turned a few heads. It's amazingly quiet, which I think surprised the locals.

THE CAR RANGE ROVER PLUG-IN HYBRID

CONVERSATION, THE EXPERTISE BEHIND THE WORLD'S MOST EXPLORATORY CAR IS FLIPPED INTO GEAR



Port Isaac is steeped in character and is my favorite town on the north Cornwall coastline. The bustling harbor has restaurants like Outlaw's Fish Kitchen, serving caught-that-morning lobster and crab.



This part of the world is filled with an embarrassment of fresh local food. Forage in the gorse-covered hills, pick up supplies from the independent grocery store in Truro, and tuck into homemade granola for breakfast at Kudhva.



Back at the Hidden Hut, Simon battled torrential rain and howling sea winds to prepare scallops with herb butter. He cooks on a simple outdoor stove or grill year round, whatever the weather.



Kudhva means "hideout" in Cornish. These metal-and-wood cabins are like futuristic tree houses, with huge windows and lanterns for late-night stumbles down the ladder.

To read more about the Range Rover Plug-in Hybrid, visit landrover.com.

THE MAN ABOUT TOWN BRUNELLO CUCINELLI ON UMBRIA

RAISED ON A FARM, THE CASHMERE DESIGN KING IS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE RENAISSANCE OF THE MEDIEVAL ITALIAN VILLAGE OF SOLOMEO. HERE, HE SHARES HIS FAVORITE ADDRESSES IN HIS HOME REGION



WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE PARTS OF UMBRIA?

"There are many villages close to my heart, but for sheer natural beauty it has to be the western stretch between Orvieto and Todi, and down south toward Narni."

WHERE ARE THE BEST PLACES FOR AN AUTHENTIC HIT?

"Narni is a tiny hamlet, tucked away in a lush, almost wild landscape, that has kept its medieval charm intact. As you wander through the squares and narrow streets, and climb the stone steps, under archways and towers, you get to see the architecture that is so typical of Umbria. Make sure to pass by the Ponte d'Augusto, which forms part of the Via Flaminia, the ancient consular road that starts in Rome

and winds through central Italy—it's an amazing connection to the history of our country."

ARE THERE ANY HIDDEN SPOTS YOU LIKE TO VISIT?

"Go below the surface in Narni to explore a fascinating underground city that twists and turns through a series of spaces, including age-old cisterns, Roman aqueduct routes, and parts of a monastic structure that leads to the beautiful little church of Santa Maria della Rupe, which was dug out of the rock."

WHERE WOULD YOU GO FOR THE MOST INCREDIBLE VIEWS?

"Todi—it's an enchanting town on a steep hillside. Every corner is spectacular, from the main square, Piazza del Popolo, to the stunning

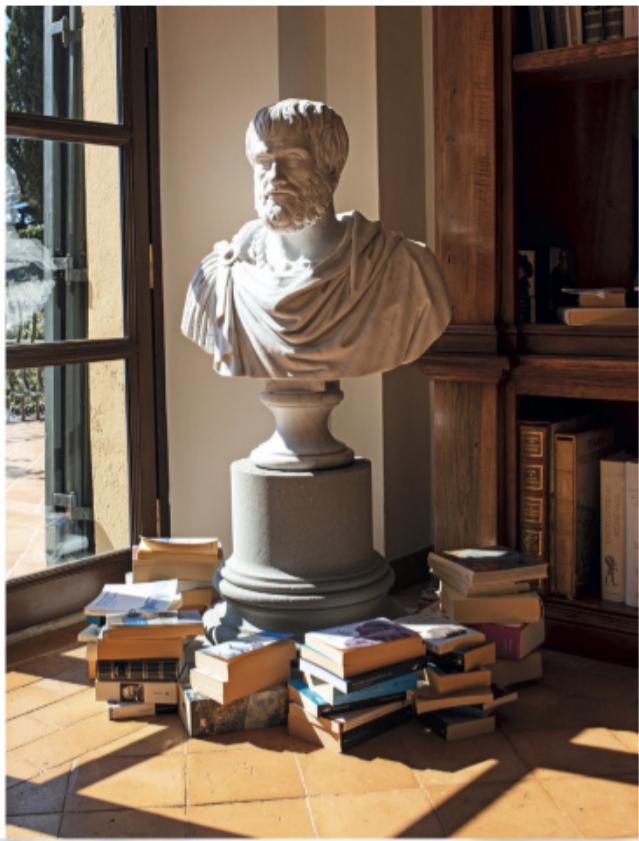
Duomo and Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi, just off it, with panoramic vistas across the valley. Whenever I walk up the precipitous roads to the square, I am reminded why the friar and poet Jacopone da Todi was so inspired by the area."

AN IDEAL PIT STOP?

"When I spend the day in Todi, I take a break at a good wine bar, such as Vineria San Fortunato, just below the temple of San Fortunato, and order a glass of Umbrian red. If I'm with friends or family, I'll go to La Cantina del Mercataccio for antipasti—cured ham, fresh tomatoes, Pecorino, and truffles."

AND A GREAT WALKING ROUTE?

"There's a lovely trail between Todi and Orvieto. Follow the gentle course of the River Tiber



Clockwise from top left: A bust at the Cucinelli villa in Solomeo; the library at the town's School of Arts and Crafts; the brand's tableware; the office; the designer in Solomeo. Opposite: Brunello Cucinelli (second from left) and family

winding through the woods—there's almost no trace of civilization. As you walk along the banks of the Lago di Corbara, the landscape starts to change: The hills become softer, the horizon opens up, and then you see Orvieto clinging to the cliffside, which seems to rise up to the sun."

YOUR TOP TIP FOR ART?

"The cathedral square in Orvieto, with the grand façade of the Duomo. It contains 500 years' worth of sculptures and mosaics. The jewel at its center is the San Brizio Chapel—the frescoes are testament to the graceful paint strokes of Benozzo Gozzoli and Luca Signorelli."

MOST INTERESTING MONUMENTS?

"I always walk the two double-helix-spiral ramps of the Pozzo di San Patrizio well in Orvieto. The

ramps work in perfect harmony, synchronizing those walking up and those going down. The dodecagonal tower in Piazza della Repubblica has a unique geometric thrust; it has been squeezed in between the Renaissance town hall of Palazzo Comunale and the Chiesa di Sant'Andrea. The crypt there contains traces of a place of worship dating back to the Villanovan culture, which preceded the Roman era."

BEST RESTAURANT FOR A TRADITIONAL DINNER?

"There are so many. For a taste of refined local cooking, head to Ristorante I Sette Consoli, which does fantastic meat dishes, including pork cheek with Jerusalem artichoke sauce and partridge with prunes and chestnuts. Or opt for a family-style setup. The food at Osteria da

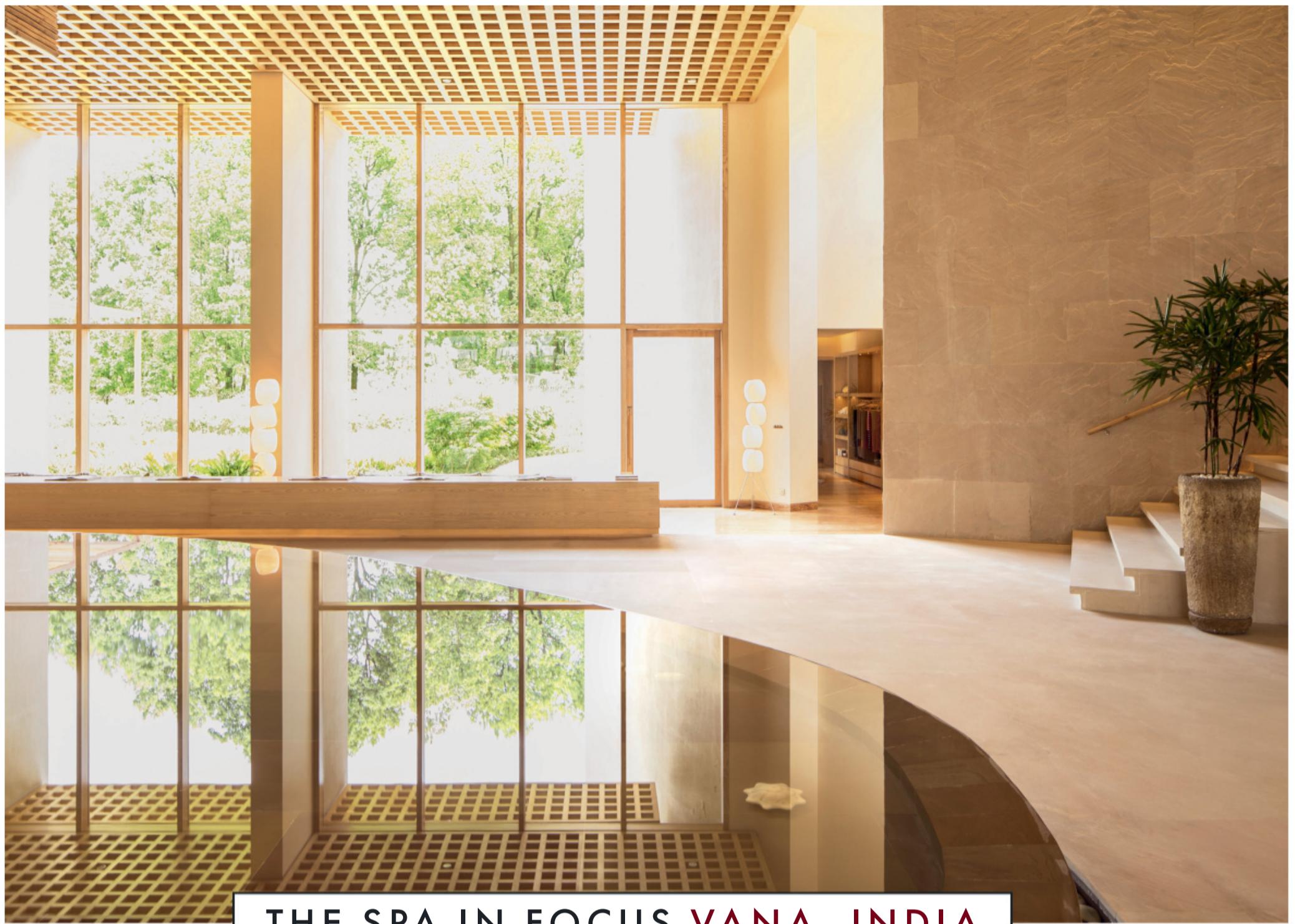
Mamma Angela is simple and delicious; it's particularly good for cured meats and cheeses."

YOUR FAVORITE REGIONAL FOOD?

"Fortunately we're still surrounded by all sorts of artisans. Every Tuesday, a shepherd in Solomeo brings us fresh ricotta, which takes me back to the time when we used to farm the countryside."

WHAT MAKES UMBRIA SPECIAL?

"It is still relatively untouched by tourism—there are some extraordinary villages and an artistic heritage rivaling that of more prominent parts of Italy. You can come across a painting by Giotto or Beato Angelico in a little country church but hardly anyone knows about it. That is the beauty of this place." CHARLOTTE DAVEY



THE SPA IN FOCUS VANA, INDIA

WELL-BEING EXPERT DAISY FINER HAS REVIEWED THE BEST DESTINATION RETREATS AROUND. YET FOR THE SLICKEST REBOOT, SHE GOES BACK TO THE MODERN INDIAN OUTPOST WHERE AGE-OLD THERAPIES SHINE



FEW THINGS HAVE changed at Vana since I first visited, a year after it opened in 2014. Back then it was by far the most progressive and comprehensive of any Indian spa I'd ever experienced. And despite renovations and improvements at its chief competitor, Ananda in the Himalayas, Vana, with its beautifully hushed ashram environment, retains the edge when it comes to spiritual luxury. I've been to pretty much every top destination spa in the world, and for release and recuperation I believe there is nowhere better.

For some, the bubble-like atmosphere at Vana can be a challenge. A stay here requires five nights minimum. Phones aren't allowed in public, and social media is forbidden (you actually have to sign something). But no detail is overlooked. The turmeric-and-ginger latte is the best you've ever tasted. The in-house bathroom goodies smell divine. Owner Veer Singh, who quietly exudes his own palpably healing energy, has personally chosen the selection of inspirational literature. The design is sharp, astounding even: a wall made of backlit pink Himalayan salt bricks, corridors lined in mysteriously beguiling images of the Buddha, lighting that lends a cool edge, and polished modern interiors (Spanish architectural firm Esteva i Esteva is responsible for the look) peppered with exquisite Indian touches—bowls of flowers, a candlelit statue of Ganesh, an underground tantric-meditation cave. Views of a verdant sal forest straight out your bedroom window complete the picture of serenity, along with a vegetable garden, an open-sided yoga *shala*, a sleek swimming pool with steam and infrared zones, and a series of impressive treatment wings, each dedicated to a different modality.

The scale of the various therapy areas is perfectly reflective of Vana's commitment to purpose. It is the 360-degree individualized approach to health here that positions India's big player next to spas like Thailand's Kamalaya or Chiva-Som. Each visit begins with a consultation with a doctor (who also checks in on your progress ➤



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► mid retreat and before you leave). You'll be asked all about your life—sleep patterns, movement, routine, how you deal with stress, any issues you want to address. Every guest is then given a prescription of treatments, classes, and advice that draws on the impressive array of offerings that Vana so gently delivers. No one is on the same program. There's an Ayurvedic center and a separate Ayurvedic restaurant; a natural-therapy wing with the likes of reflexology, five-elements acupuncture, and craniosacral therapy; a high-tech gym; and, for me, the absolute highlight, the Sowa Rigpa center.

Also known as traditional Tibetan medicine, Sowa Rigpa has its roots in Ayurveda, Chinese medicine, and Buddhism. This amalgamation makes it truly unique, and the doctors and therapists at Vana are alumni of the Institute of Tibetan Medicine and Astrology,

dishes are tempting. Breakfast is also a treat: masala omelets, pistachio milk, homemade yogurt, and kombucha. The point is not to deprive yourself but to find your own way. Tune in to what your body needs. Nature holds the answers: This is the backbone to life at Vana. There's fresh aloe vera in the gardens in case of sunburn; daily afternoon tea involves brewing freshly picked herbs; and the Vana calendar marks not just the seasons but auspicious dates, the phases of the moon, festivals, and important days of prayer. There is something truly honoring and authentic in the approach. Ritual, music, food, and creative expression are all woven into the melody.

A carefully curated selection of activities punctuates the days. There are three different yoga classes daily, talks on everything from the art of traditional Chinese medicine to the *Yoga Sutras of*

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Men-Tsee-Khang. Treatments start with the calling in of the healing powers of Blue Medicine Buddha, and bring in herbs, therapeutic oils as prescribed in ancient Tibetan medicine texts, warm poultices, body-releasing and scalp-easing touch, and hot towels on feet. After one of my 75-minute sessions, I am lolling in an armchair in the relaxation area, sipping smoky herbal tea, warm in my kidneys and to my bones. In the background the sound of earthy sanctified Tibetan chanting is soaking the air in peaceful vibrations. I catch eyes with a woman sitting opposite me. "Are you floating?" she asks. I nod in the affirmative.

Food is definitely a highlight at Vana. Don't come expecting to starve. Several of the guests I spoke to were worried that they'd actually *put on* pounds. The micro desserts, especially the crème brûlée, are hard to resist, and the vast help-yourself lunches of soups, homemade breads, vegetable curries, dal, paneer, and fish and meat

Patanjali, lessons in om chanting, body-weight circuit training, walking meditation, and trips to Rishikesh to perform Aarti, a ritual in which votives and flowers are set afloat on the Ganges as the four elements combine in perfect synergy.

No wonder Vana has found its following. As a center of mental and spiritual balance, it has matured into a place I would recommend to even the fussiest. Everything here is about comfort levels. There's nothing too raw or new-fangled or invasive. Unlike the detox clinics of Europe, there are no finite rules. You find your own flow; you and your body are treated with reverence. Problems ease. Energy rises. Vital life force is reborn. When I meet up with friends two weeks after my stay they comment on the fact that I can't stop smiling. Something in me has dissipated. Life is starting to feel good again. Sometimes, it's as much about what you take home with you as it is the experience itself.

Healing Holidays (inquiries@healingholidays.com; 646-568-9943) offers a seven-night Ashram program at Vana from \$2,350 per person, sharing a Forest room, with full board and program, including return domestic flights from Delhi to Dehradun

THE SHOPPING HACK "I BOUGHT A CUSTOM-BUILT SEVEN ODONATA BIKE IN THE HAMPTONS, WHICH I WAS MEASURED FOR LIKE A SUIT." ARCHITECT JOHN PAWSON

travel light
(and bubbly).



smartwater
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THE INSPIRATION PAINTING

JEWELERS AND WATCHMAKERS HAVE ALWAYS MINED AN ARTISTIC SEAM. IN THE LATEST INTERPLAY, THEY ZONE IN ON THE MASTERS ON VIEW IN MUSEUMS SUCH AS NEW YORK'S MET AND LONDON'S TATE. BY JESSICA DIAMOND



© CY TWOMBLY FOUNDATION



UNTITLED (BACCHUS), BY CY TWOMBLY

WHERE CAN I SEE IT? Tate Modern, London

HOW CAN I WEAR IT? As ruby and diamond earrings by Graff.

THE LOWDOWN Those lucky enough to get a peek inside the Mayfair headquarters of British jewelers Graff will know that the walls are covered with modern art; Laurence Graff is one of the world's foremost collectors—with works by Warhol, Basquiat, and Haring among the pieces he owns. It's no surprise then that this gallery-like environment has rubbed off on the Graff design team, which looked to the free-flowing lines of Cy Twombly for one of its latest collections.

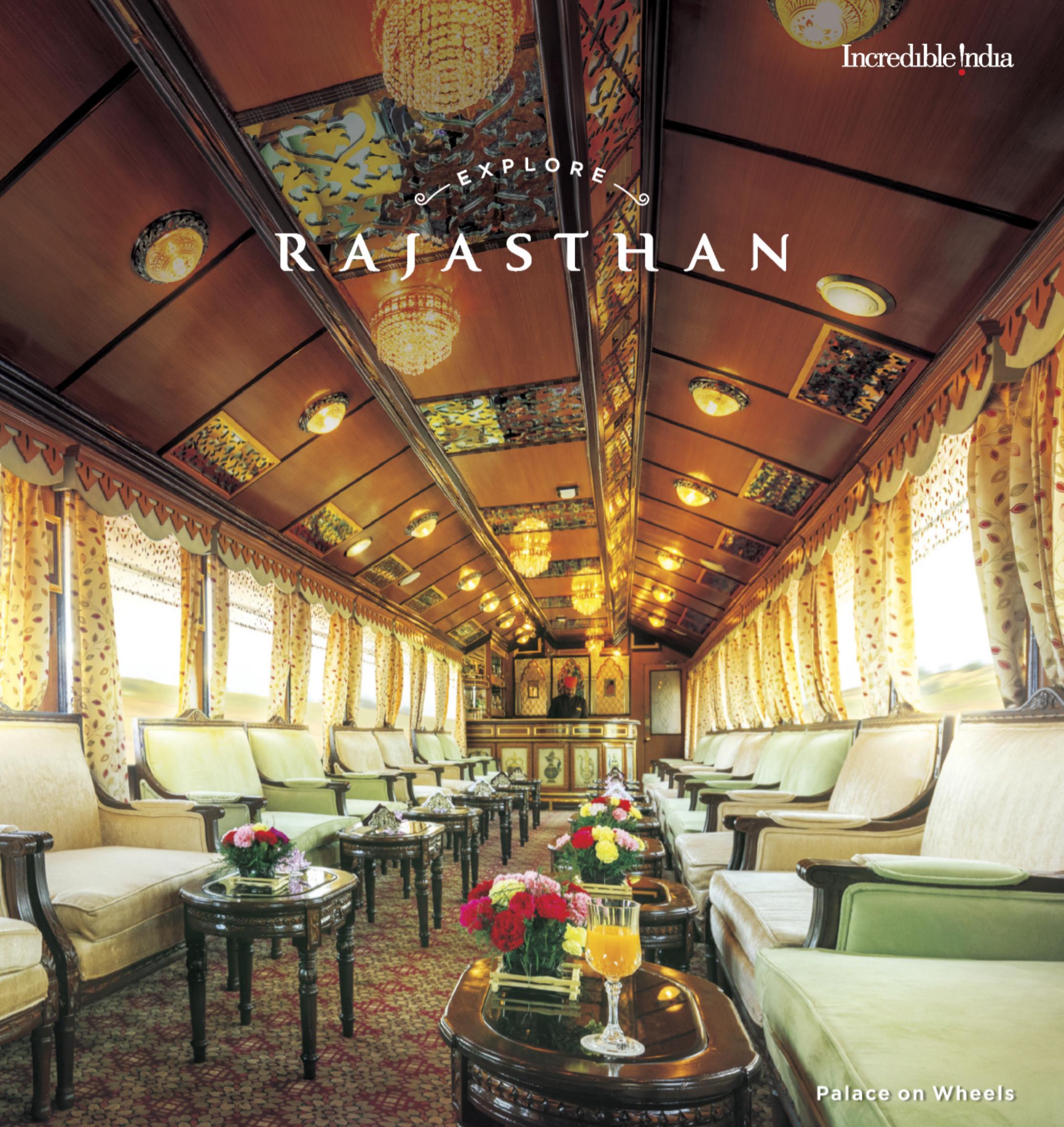
These earrings, with their looping, calligraphic swirls of rubies, are a precious reinterpretation of one of Twombly's most iconic works.

Ruby and diamond earrings, price upon request, **Graff** (graff.com)

PHOTOGRAPH: © TATE IMAGES

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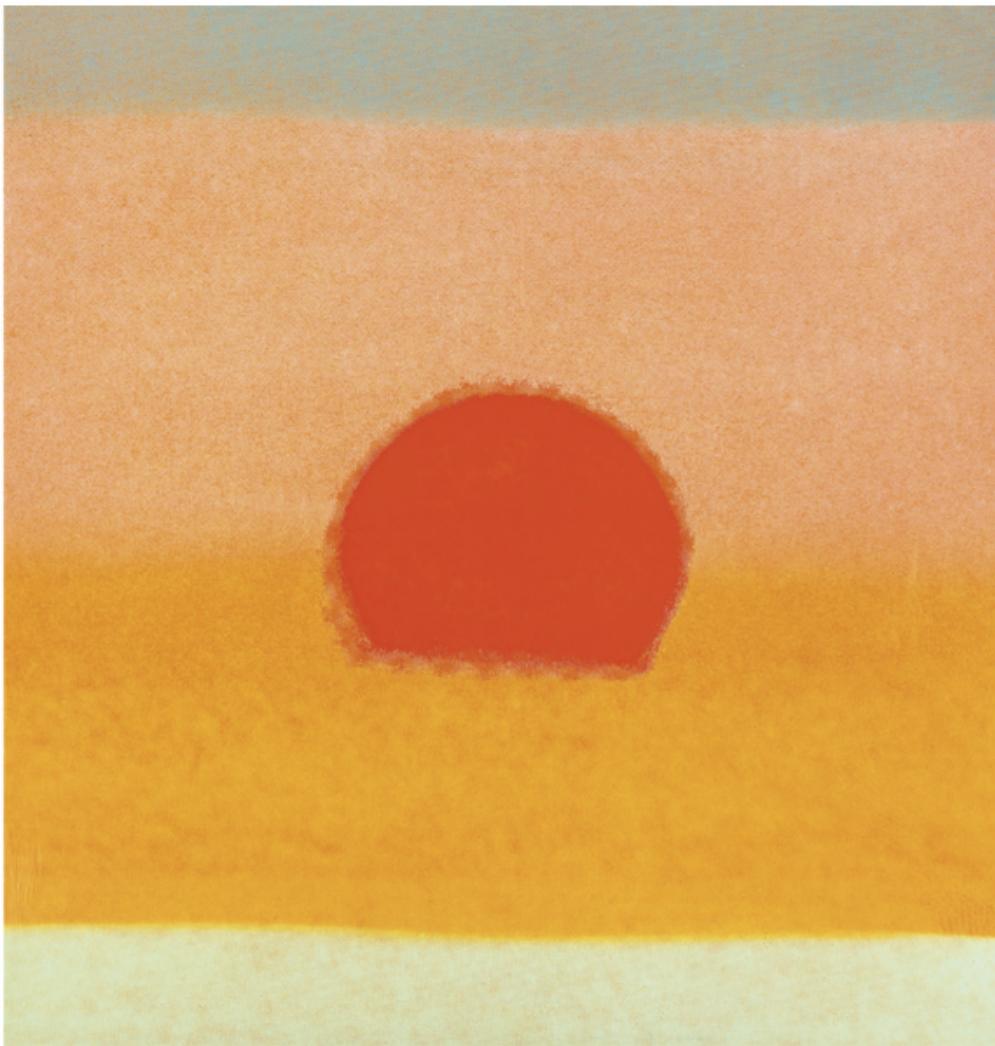
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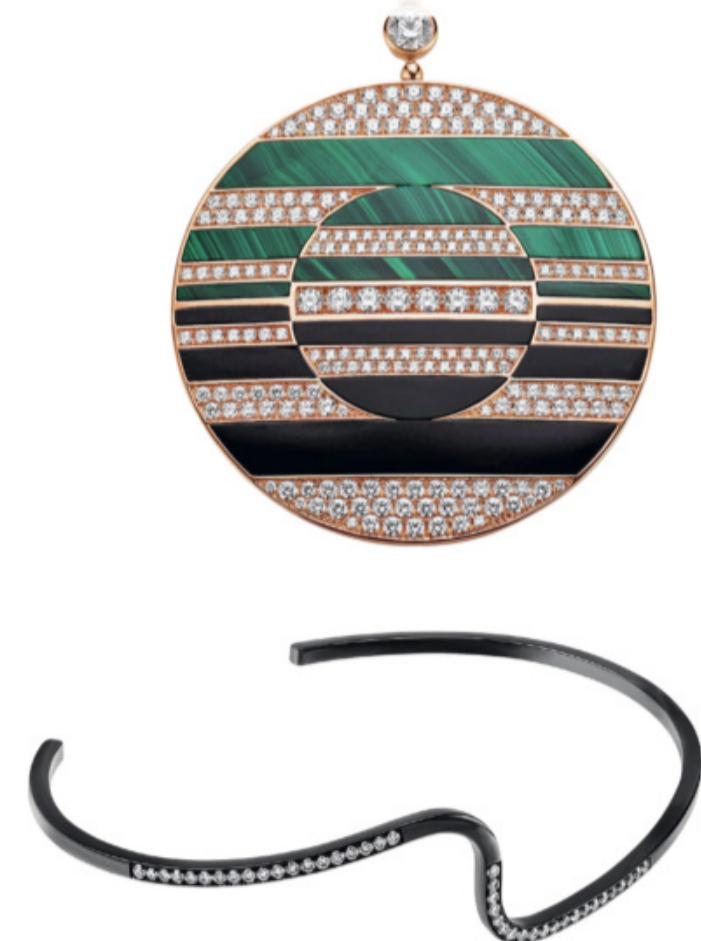
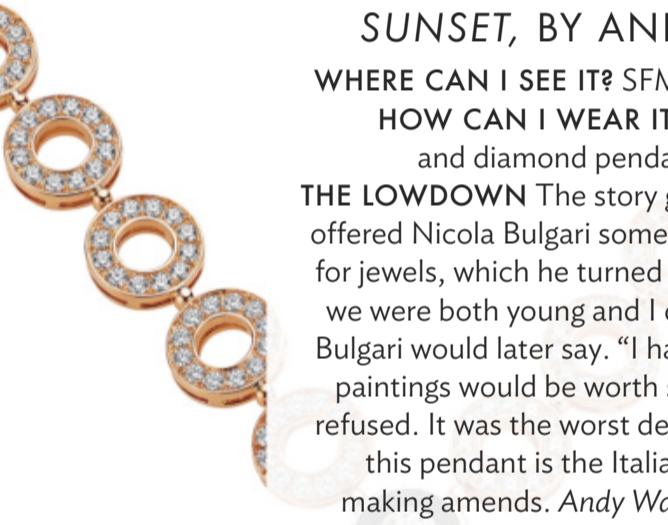


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SUNSET, BY ANDY WARHOL

WHERE CAN I SEE IT? SFMOMA, San Francisco
HOW CAN I WEAR IT? As a malachite and diamond pendant by Bulgari.

THE LOWDOWN The story goes that Andy Warhol offered Nicola Bulgari some paintings in exchange for jewels, which he turned down. "In those days, we were both young and I did not like his style," Bulgari would later say. "I had no idea one day his paintings would be worth so much, so I simply refused. It was the worst deal of my life." Perhaps this pendant is the Italian jeweler's way of making amends. *Andy Warhol Sunset necklace in rose gold, onyx, malachite, and diamonds, price upon request, Bulgari* (bulgari.com)



PRIMAVERA, BY SANDRO BOTTICELLI

WHERE CAN I SEE IT? The Uffizi Gallery, Florence
HOW CAN I WEAR IT? As a gold and pearl hair clip by Sophie Bille Brahe.

THE LOWDOWN Danish jeweler Bille Brahe has turned to one of the most iconic paintings in the world and focused on details that to most might go unnoticed. Direct your gaze to the Three Graces, specifically the one on the right, and you'll spot the pearls that adorn her hair. Fortunately, the pearls are lined up in a crescent shape, an arrangement Brahe is perhaps most known

for in her diamond earrings—and now with this hair barrette. Tumbling Renaissance curls and a floaty see-through gown are optional.

Croissant Grace hair pin, \$860, Sophie Bille Brahe (net-a-porter.com)



PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTIE'S IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES; AKG-IMAGES/ERICH LESSING/ALAMY

FREE CURVE TO THE POINT, BY WASSILY KANDINSKY

WHERE CAN I SEE IT? The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
HOW CAN I WEAR IT? As a gold and diamond earring and bracelet by Kova.

THE LOWDOWN Russian-born designer Katie Kova is unapologetic about tapping the art of her homeland for inspiration. Russian Suprematism, with its geometric forms, has proved the starting point for her jewels. Lucky for her, the trend in fine jewelry for graphic linear shapes shows no sign of slowing. *Earring 04.II in gold set with diamonds, \$2,360; bracelet 01.II (left) in black gold set with diamonds, \$2,880, both Kova* (kovajewels.shop)



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THE GREAT WAVE OFF KANAGAWA, BY HOKUSAI

WHERE CAN I SEE IT? National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

HOW CAN I WEAR IT? As a Reverso Tribute Enamel timepiece.

THE LOWDOWN Flip over the watchcase of a Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso and you're presented with a flat tablet of metal to adorn. The obvious choice would be an engraving; the Métiers Rares workshops of this Swiss house chose instead to paint it with enamel, replicating some of the world's most famous artworks. Our favorite is the depiction of Hokusai's *Great Wave*, part of his "Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji" series of 19th-century woodcuts that first introduced Japanese art to the Western world.

Act quickly to pick one up, though—just eight of this very limited edition have been produced.

Reverso Tribute Enamel Hokusai Wave, price upon request, **Jaeger-LeCoultre** (jaeger-lecoultre.com)



FEMME A L'OMBRELLE DANS UN JARDIN, BY RENOIR

WHERE CAN I SEE IT? The Thyssen, Madrid

HOW CAN I WEAR IT? As an Ecritures de Chaumet watch.

THE LOWDOWN Chaumet has settled on the Impressionists for its latest collection—but wisely eschewed any attempts to minimize a Monet onto a dial-size area. Instead, it has zoomed in, slightly like the effect of standing very close to a Seurat or a Renoir and things get a bit blurry. Here, a section of one of Renoir's masterpieces is rendered in oil paint on a tiny circle of canvas, the thick daubs of the original shrunk, refined, and speckled with gold leaf. Hold it at arm's length and watch it slip back into focus. *Ecritures de Chaumet*, price upon request, **Chaumet** (chaumet.com)



A POSTED SCENERY, BY HITOTZUKI

WHERE CAN I SEE IT? Tokyo's Yutenji district

HOW CAN I WEAR IT? As a MasterGraff Métiers d'Art Graffiti timepiece.

THE LOWDOWN Watch manufacturers are traditional outfits—more Old Masters than urban murals. But a shift of late has seen some big-name brands cast their inspiration nets a little wider, conscious that a younger audience is keen for something edgier. Tag Heuer and Hublot have already collaborated with street artists on dial designs, and now it's Graff's turn. This color-pop piece with a handpainted enamel dial is inspired by Japanese street art—wear it while viewing *A Posted Scenery*, by husband-and-wife duo Hitotzuki. *MasterGraff Métiers d'Art Graffiti*, price upon request, **Graff** (graffdiamonds.com)





The Baths, Virgin Gorda.

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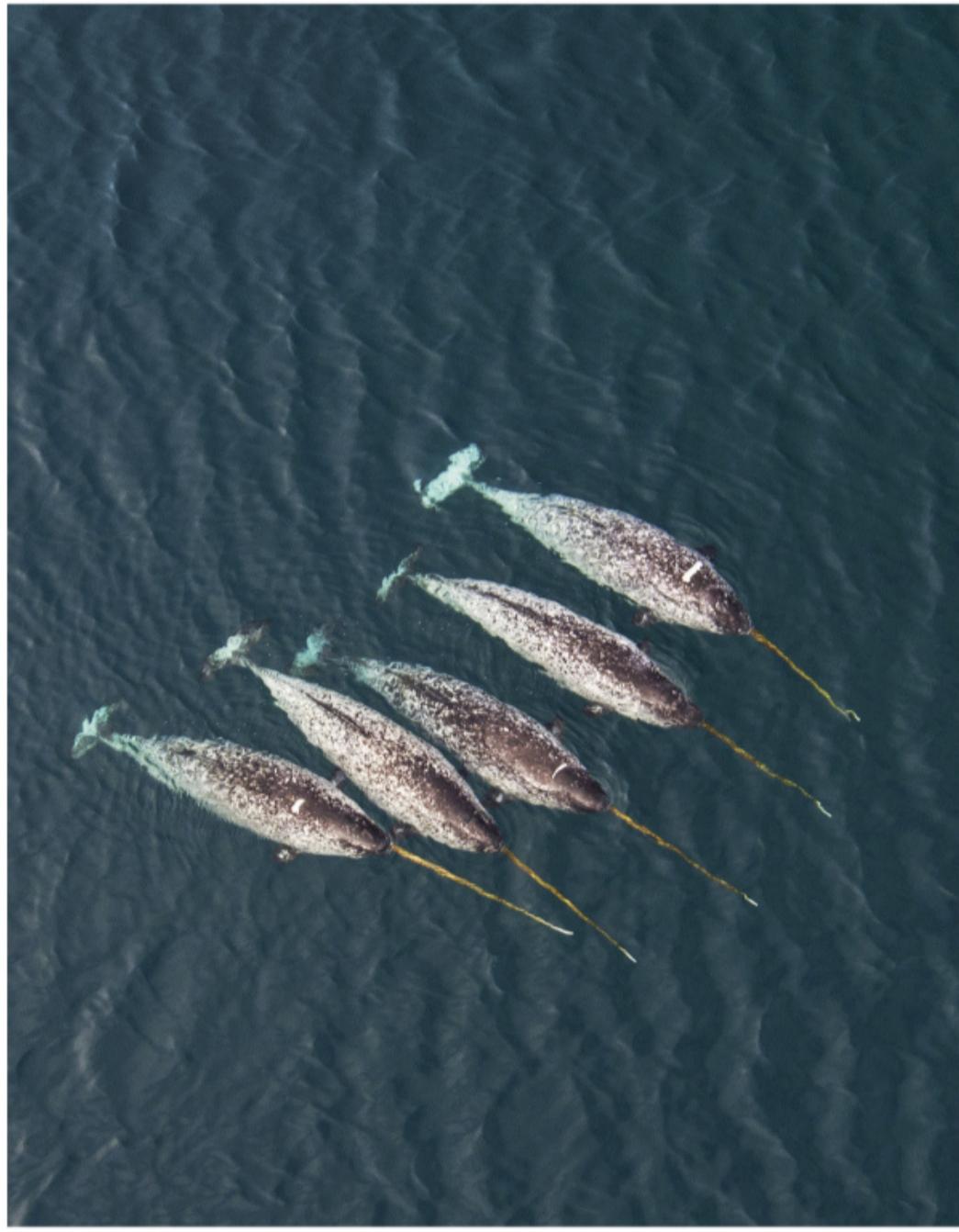
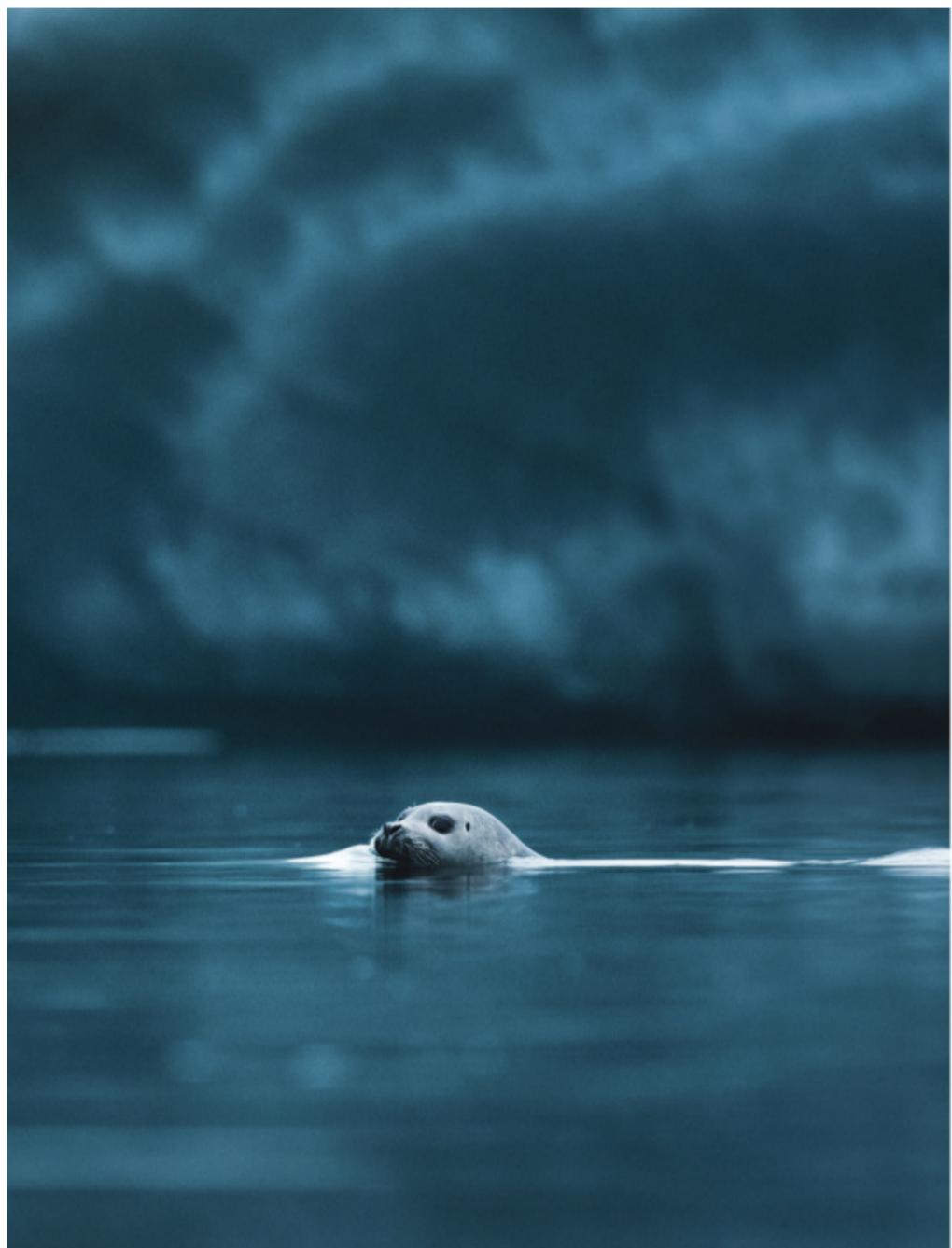
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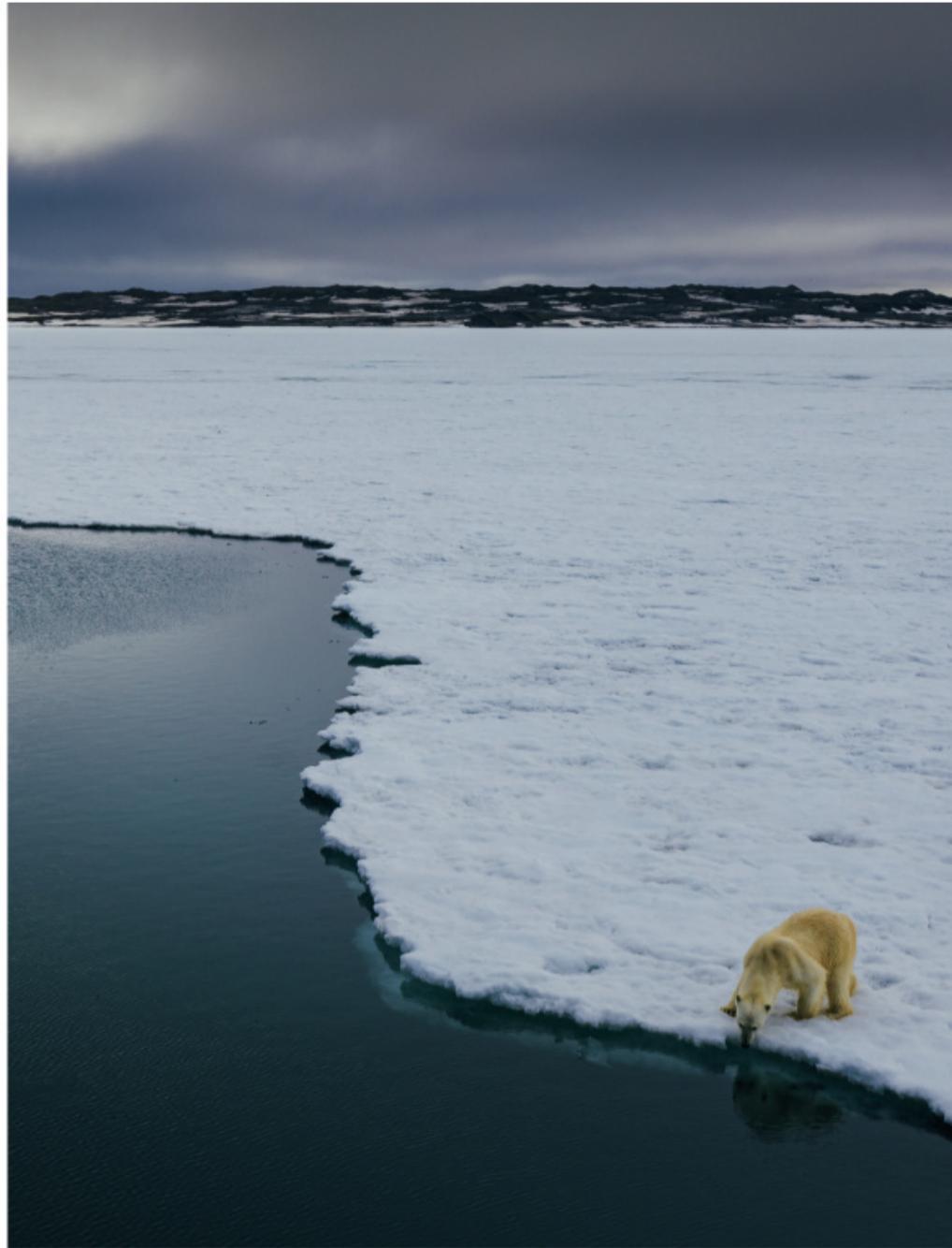
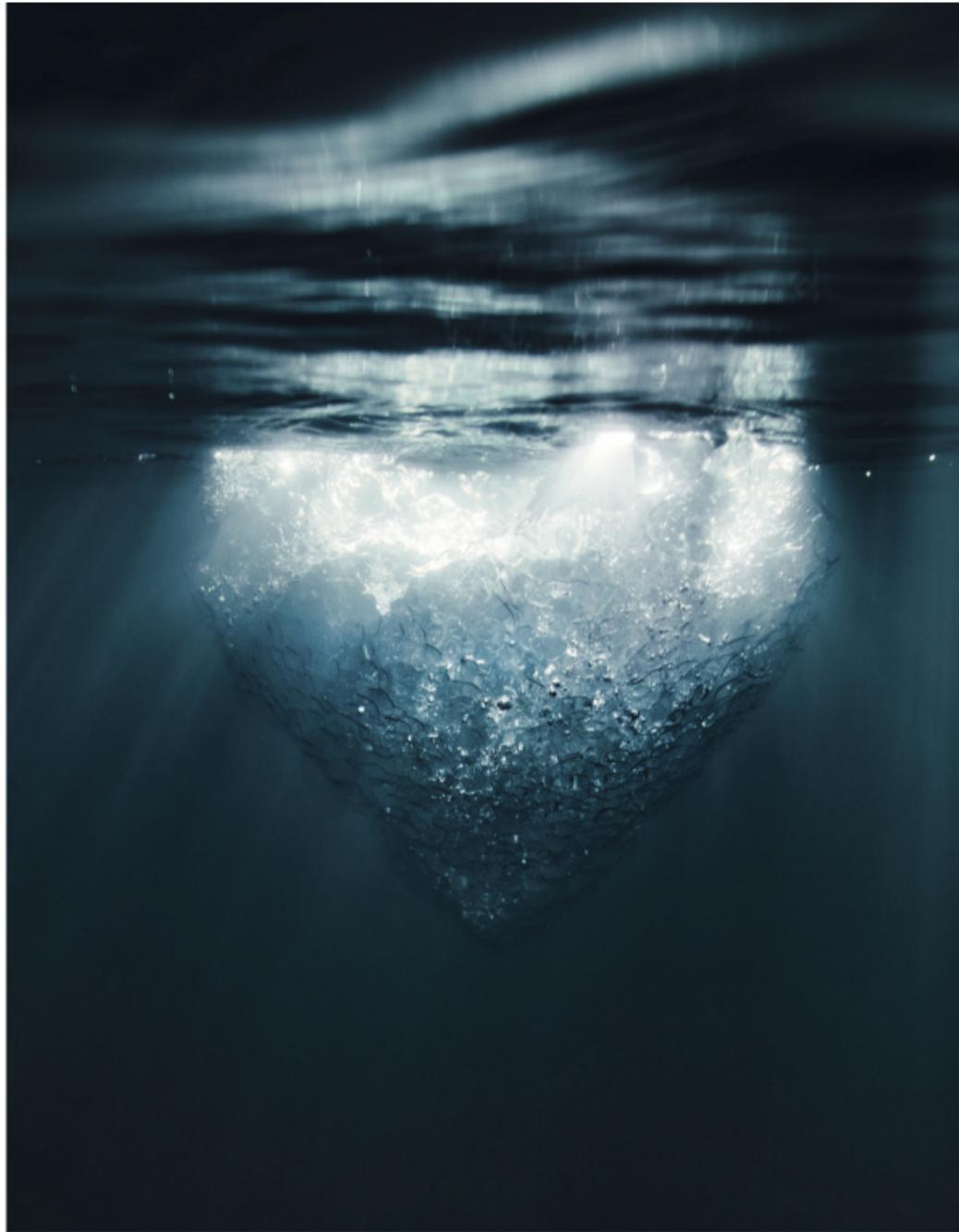
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THE EXTREME EXPERIENCE INTO THE ARCTIC

DEEP IN REMOTEST CANADA, THE FAMILY OF THE MAN WHO'S BEEN TO THE NORTH POLE MORE TIMES THAN ANYONE ELSE HOSTS EXPLORERS IN THE MOST FAR-OUT HABITAT. BY MAGGIE SHIPSTEAD

AFTER OUR THIRD ATTEMPT TO LAND, I started to wonder about plan B. Thirteen of us were in the Twin Otter: eight guests, three guides, a pilot, and a copilot. The cloud ceiling kept inching lower, and a strong crosswind held the gravel airstrip's wind sock out like a rigid, forbidding arm. We were returning to Arctic Watch, a remote lodge in Canada's outermost far north, after a trip to Beechey Island, a place one of the guides had giddily called "next-level bleak."

Even in midsummer, Beechey was extravagantly desolate. Snow clung to barren, flat-topped hills. A puddle of blood on the frozen bay was the only splash of color, the remnant of a polar bear kill. In 1845–1846, the two ships of Sir John Franklin's ill-fated Northwest Passage expedition spent months locked fast in that ice. Three sailors died and were buried on the shore. Eventually, elsewhere, Franklin and his other 126 men all vanished into the Arctic, dying of exposure, starvation, and disease.

We'd visited the graves and meandered there under a cold rain until the pilot beckoned. The conditions were deteriorating, he said. If we didn't leave Beechey now, we'd be stuck.

There were no navigational instruments at Arctic Watch, just that wind sock, so the pilot needed to stay below the weather. As we skimmed over the Barrow Strait, clouds pushed us down to 130 feet, the black water so close I felt like I was on a boat.

At Somerset Island, where Arctic Watch overlooks an inlet populated in summer by hundreds of beluga whales, the pilot lined up his approach. We passed over swirls of silt, over ghostly white

belugas in turquoise water, descending until I expected the jolt of the wheels. At the last second, a gust of wind made the pilot throttle up. We came around again, bailed, circled.

But never underestimate an Arctic bush pilot. On his fourth attempt, ours brought the plane in almost sideways before letting the wind push it square to land smoothly. After he'd shut off the engines, he turned in his seat. "I'm not gonna lie," he said, "that was the hardest I've worked in a long time."

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE ARCTIC, as I do, its challenges are part of its appeal. At first, the region might show you only glacier-scraped rock, and discourage you with ice-choked waterways, but if you're willing to be patient, look again. Somerset Island is a chance to glimpse life at its most wild and tenacious.

"This is as pure as it gets," said Tessum Weber, the elder son of the family that has owned and run Arctic Watch since 2000 and a recently accredited master polar guide. "I truly believe this is the last environment we have yet to modify."

The Arctic demands serious know-how, and the Webers' depth of experience makes them uniquely qualified to bring even the most helpless city dwellers into the high latitudes. Richard, the patriarch, has an assessing gaze, a reserved air, and a list of polar accomplishments too long to name. The upshot: He's trekked to the North Pole more than anyone in history, including on the only unsupported out-and-back expedition ever. His wife, Josée Auclair, has also led ➤

► expeditions to both Poles, and as soon as Tessum and his younger brother, Nansen, could walk, they spent summers running wild with bears and wolves on nearby Baffin Island. In 2010, when he was 20, Tessum went with Richard to the North Pole, setting a speed record and becoming the youngest person to achieve the feat.

Life here is far from cushy. Getting to Arctic Watch requires a three-plus-hour charter flight from Yellowknife, in the Northwest Territories, weather permitting. (It doesn't always.) A heated permanent tent serves as the main lodge, and bedrooms are in smaller tents with marine toilets and portable radiators. Temperatures in midsummer range from the low 30s to as high as 70, though during my visit we barely cracked 40 and the wind never let up.

But—but!—considering the vast, hostile emptiness around us, we visitors were living in mind-boggling luxury. The Arctic is defined by scarcity, but our delicious, bountiful meals seemed like the conjurings of a sorcerer: rack of lamb, mushroom gnocchi, crisp salad, crème brûlée, good wine, tasting flights of whiskey.

Every morning, the Webers and the guides presented us with options. Would you like to look for polar bears? Or paddleboard on the Cunningham River? Off you go, safely out on an adventure you'd never in a million years be able to do on your own.

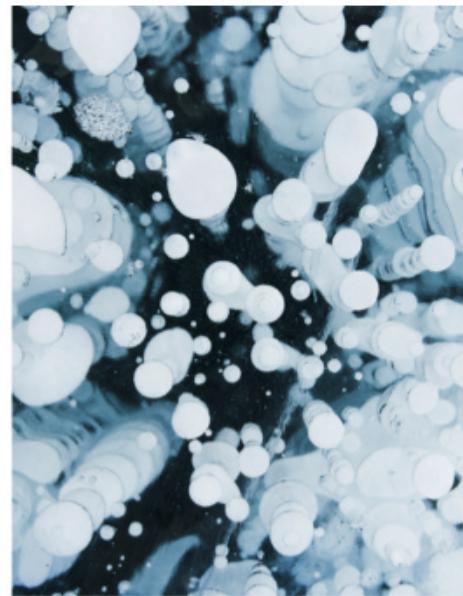
EVEN IN MIDSUMMER, THIS REACH OF LAND IS EXTRAVAGANTLY DESOLATE. A PUDDLE OF BLOOD FROM A POLAR BEAR KILL IS THE ONLY SPLASH OF COLOR

ONE DAY I THREW ELBOWS TO GET a spot on what Bleak Dave called “an epic mission” to fish for Arctic char in Lake Inukshuk, two hours from the lodge by ATV. I don’t actually like fishing, but one pathway to my heart is marked “Epic Mission.” We bundled up and set out, a married couple of fly-fishing enthusiasts from Toronto, a twenty-something actuary from Ottawa, and I, roaring along a sandy track, muscling over rocks and through streams. Tessum led the way; his fiancée (now wife), Virginie, shepherded from the rear.

Through a snow squall, a pale smudge moved on a gully’s edge. Tessum stopped, peered through binoculars. “It’s an Arctic wolf,” he stage-whispered, obviously thrilled. “I can’t believe it!” He’d never seen one on Somerset. The wolf watched us, its gaze sharp and confident. We rode on, and the animal vanished.

I’m sorry to say I still don’t love fishing. At Lake Inukshuk, I cast half-heartedly into the blowing snow and was relieved not to catch anything. The Canadians had a blast.

On our way back, the clouds broke apart, and sunlight slanted down onto a scattered herd of musk oxen. We approached on foot, single file, until Tessum held up a hand, stopping us. While the females grazed placidly, two bulls backed up and then charged, long fur flying, the clack of their colliding horns audible over the wind.



Pointing out a distant white blob across the tundra, Tessum said it was a snowy owl, possibly with a nest. Did we want to see?

The bird flapped off as we approached. No nest, but under its perch we found the small, perfect body of a baby Arctic fox. Tessum picked up the little animal and rubbed its chest. “Sorry,” he said, setting down the kit. “I get emotional about Arctic foxes. I really like them.”

I stroked its gray fur, relieved that the Webers’ decades in the Arctic hadn’t made human tenderness something to scorn. Tessum said he wouldn’t be surprised if the wolf was already nearby, having smelled a potential meal. One life feeds another.

THE DAY WE WERE SUPPOSED TO LEAVE, the weather did not let us. The next day, we said our goodbyes at the airstrip as the plane circled overhead with a fresh load of visitors. But the cloud

dropped lower, too low. The plane flew away, back to Yellowknife.

I didn’t envy the Webers, having to deal with a streak of unusually bad logistical luck, having to deal with grumpy guests who were all suddenly aviation experts. But people who ski to the Poles apparently gain a certain equanimity. Firmly but politely, they reminded us this was the Arctic. We must be patient and make the best of things. So we ate the other group’s welcome dinner and drank their welcome wine. Afterward, in the lodge’s great room, an airy space

decorated with musk ox rugs and narwhal tusks, a guide, Drew, played his guitar. For a silly moment, I imagined an affinity with Franklin’s men, trapped at the mercy of the Arctic.

Just north of the lodge, I’d seen the remnants of a settlement where, nearly a thousand years ago, the Thule people had wintered in semisubterranean oval houses, each with whale-oil lamps burning on stone platforms, flickering through months of darkness. The stones are still there. A brilliant orange lichen grows on them, sustained by the residue of lamps lit by humans who couldn’t begin to imagine our airplanes, ATVs, and mushroom gnocchi.

Late the next day, a Twin Otter shuttled us to Resolute Bay, an impressively barren settlement with instruments that enabled our charter to land. As we took off for Yellowknife, I felt the melancholy that comes with an adventure’s end. In the wan nocturnal daylight, a tattered archipelago of empty islands and a frozen sea passed below. It was already hard to believe I had actually been there. ☀

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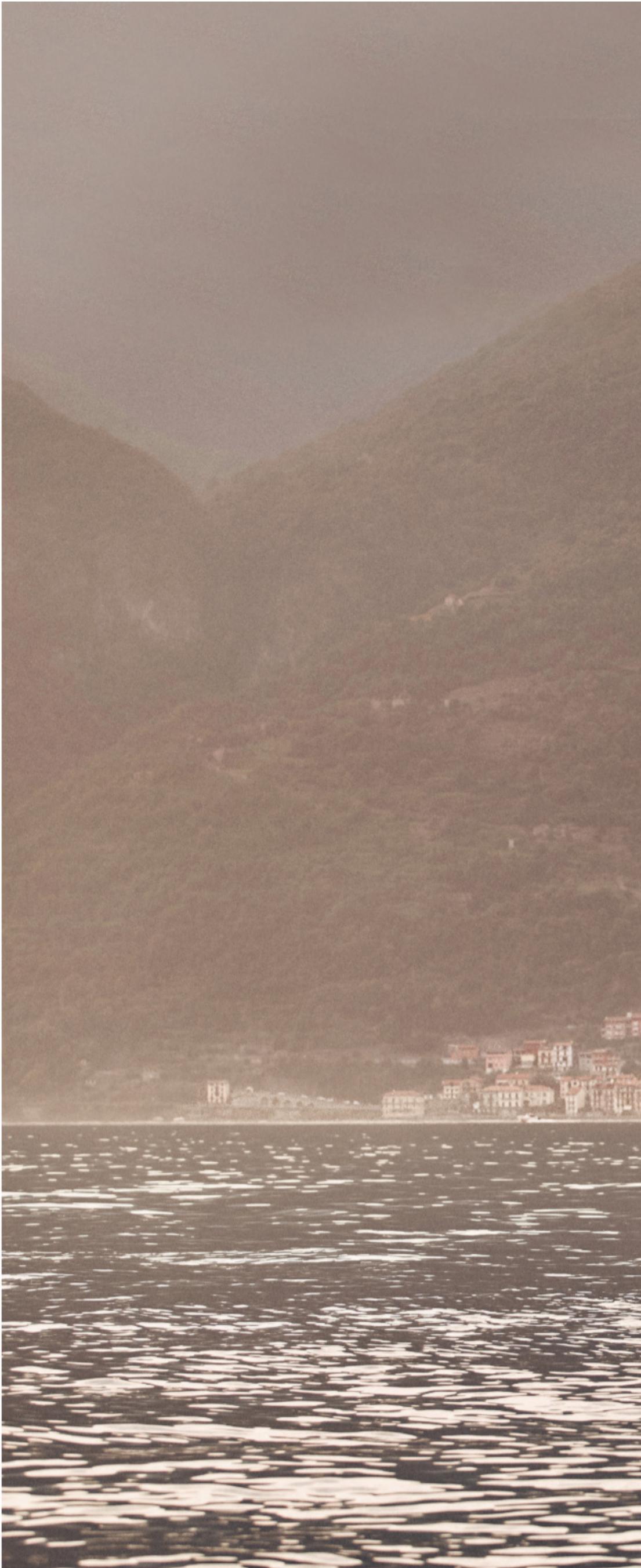


THE EDITORS' PICK

THE WORLD'S BEST TRAVEL SPECIALISTS 2019

Booking a trip with an exceptional travel adviser has huge upsides. They remove the burden of the niggling details (the visas, the transfers, the reservations), but far more than that, they have the insider knowledge, the prolific contacts, the exclusive access, and the sharp instincts to transform a vacation into an experience of a lifetime, whether it's tracking Siberian tigers in Russia's Far East or celebrating Day of the Dead in Michoacán. Here's a taste of *Condé Nast Traveler's* Top Travel Specialists for 2019: the agents and fixers, explorers and connoisseurs, historians and naturalists, instigators and hand-holders we most highly recommend. For the complete list of all 185 of our trusted experts, go to cntraveler.com/travel-specialists.

BY ALEX POSTMAN AND CHRISTINE CANTERA







CATHERINE HEALD

REMOTE LANDS, SOUTHEAST ASIA AND JAPAN

“Fear of mediocrity” compels Heald to plunge into Asia’s still-mysterious pockets, from the snowy shrines of Tohoku, Japan, to the rice terraces of Banaue, Philippines.

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JALSA URUBSHUROW

NOMADIC EXPEDITIONS, MONGOLIA

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STUART RIGG

SOUTHERN CROSSINGS, AUSTRALIA

Based in Australia for more than 30 years, British-born Rigg is the go-to for the best the continent has on tap right now, comprising classic routes and distant milk runs. That could mean a fly-by of the Bungle Bungle range in the remote Kimberley, or an inside-track food-and-fashion tour in cosmopolitan Melbourne; a visit to a remote Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land, or a day of tastings in South Australia’s Coonawarra wine region. And his clients can sleep soundly knowing that Rigg, with a refined sense of

order and mission, keeps obsessive record of both the chicest new boutique hotels in every Aussie metropolis and the country’s dreamiest Outback stations. southerncrossings.com



JACK SHAW

EPIC EUROPE, THE ALPS

For 10 years, Shaw has approached his adopted homeland of Switzerland with the dogged curiosity of the former travel journalist that he is. Headquartered in the Valais region, with bases dotting Italy and France, Shaw can pull together a sunset run off the Breuil saddle of the Matterhorn as seamlessly as a hike along the wildflower-carpeted trails of Zermatt or free riding in the Dolomites’ Val Mezdi. While Epic Europe offers its share of adrenaline-jacking point-to-point trekking, heli-skiing, and Alpine climbing, Shaw is also tight with small wine producers and local farmers who’ll open up their sky-high barns for cheese making, and he can snag last-minute VIP tickets to the Montreux Jazz Festival or Art Basel. epiceurope.com



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WILL JONES
JOURNEYS BY DESIGN, ETHIOPIA
AND NORTHERN KENYA

Raised in six African countries, Jones spent school holidays with famed paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey developing a fierce, and fiercely ethical, sense of adventure that shapes his wildly original itineraries for both the bold and the boldfaced. He's as likely to be found trekking into the cauldrons of Ethiopia's Danakil Depression (see page 90) and camping on the Omo River to visit the lip-plate wearing Surma as in the high-design lodges of Laikipia with Ralph Lauren's family. journeysbydesign.com



MEI ZHANG
WILDCHINA, CHINA

A gifted storyteller and author (*Travels Through Dali With a Leg of Ham*), Zhang is obsessed with foodie travel and relishes sending visitors in pursuit of regional specialties like traditional *rushan* cheese in Yunnan, or fiery *mapo* tofu in Chengdu. As a Chinese national based in the U.S., Zhang can access corners of the Middle Kingdom that are still impenetrable to many foreign agents, and her impressive roster of contacts has helped her wrangle normally out-of-reach experiences, whether meeting with traditional Chinese Taoist practitioners in the Wudang Mountains, visiting restricted areas of the Mogao Caves, or dropping in at Ai Weiwei's private art studio. wildchina.com

CHRISTOS STERGIOU
TRUE TRIPS, GREECE

After growing up in Athens and Patmos, Stergiou completed his own odyssey, nabbing an M.B.A. from Stanford, then returning home to give visitors a luxe, intimate experience of unspoiled Greece. He can flag up that spot-on little taverna helmed by someone's *yia-yia* on the quiet side of Mykonos but has a boyish enthusiasm for the ancient stone villages and mythical mountain vistas of the Peloponnese. truetrips.com



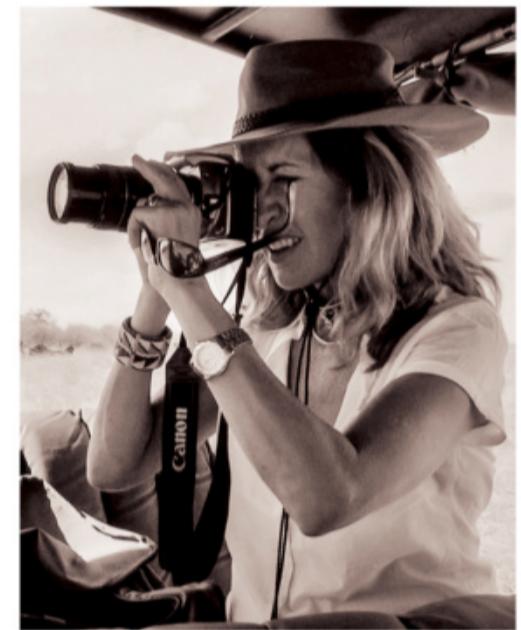
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CHERRI BRIGGS
EXPLORE, INC., CENTRAL,
EASTERN & SOUTHERN AFRICA

Briggs once did a two-week *mokoro*-canoe trip across the Okavango and spent nine months solo exploring Tunisia and the Libyan desert. A female Livingstone with a perfect blowout, Briggs applies her thirst for discovery to her conservation-minded trips, be it horseback riding through Kenya's great plains or a heli drop-in to a five-star eco-resort in Madagascar. Based in Zambia, she brings clients like Gloria Steinem to support women entrepreneurs in local communities, creating deeply personal connections when and where the world needs them most. exploreinc.com



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Geoghegan is intensely passionate about wellness and the crucial role she plays in matchmaking the tired, the unfit, the stressed, and the burnt-out with the ideal program. She handpicks the best Austrian medi-spas and Thai yoga retreats, American heavy hitters and tiny (but deeply special) outfits with practitioners worth flying for. With her throaty laugh and Irish lilt, she makes clients—often vulnerable or unsure—feel at ease. No one gets a *panchakarma* purge they're not ready for. Highly reassuring. healingholidays.co.uk





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EMILY FITZROY

BELLINI TRAVEL, ITALY

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JONNY BEALBY

WILD FRONTIERS, NORTH INDIA AND PAKISTAN



A rock singer who rode the old Silk Road by horse, Bealby takes an equally daring approach to offbeat travel, from the Hindu Kush to the cedar forests of Kashmir.

wildfrontiers.com

PAUL IRVINE

DEHOUCHE, BRAZIL

Irvine, a Brit who's lived in Rio de Janeiro for 15 years, has strong—and well-informed—opinions on Brazil's most popular destinations.

He'll seek out everything from the shack that serves freshly caught lobster in coconut sauce in the beach town of Trancoso to cooking classes with São Paulo's top chefs and the best tucked-away hotels in Rio. But he's also passionate about the country's less-explored gems, like wildlife spotting in the swamps of the Pantanal, or Tiradentes, a picturesque 300-year-old village with superlative food, just 40 minutes by plane from Rio. dehouche.com



DEBORAH CALMEYER

ROAR AFRICA, SOUTHERN AND EAST AFRICA

When Robert Redford made his first return trip to Africa in decades, he tapped Calmeyer to pull off his stay in one of Botswana's highest-end camps. But her bespoke safaris, which usher clients to luxe Singita Pamushana in her native Zimbabwe and sculpture-filled Segera in Northern Kenya, aren't the half of it. With deep regional roots (she's 11th-generation African), Calmeyer's wildly extensive black book gives her near-exclusive access to the best private homes, gardens, and art collections—and the resources to wow visitors with Africa's other Big Five: food, fashion, art, culture, and design. Highly polished yet steel-willed, Calmeyer has been known to engineer a separate airport check-in area for her guests so they speed through. Who else could persuade Cape Town chef Luke Dale-Roberts to shutter his famed Test Kitchen on a Saturday for a client dinner? roarafrica.com





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ZACHARY RABINOR

JOURNEY MEXICO, MEXICO

Rabinor, who lives with his family in Puerto Vallarta, has private access to sites like Chichén Itzá and Palenque, connections with artisans in Oaxaca, and entry to local festivals like the Day of the Dead in Michoacán villages. A sandy-haired surfer, he's an unrivaled source for the country's best breaks and is a whiz at crafting thrills like a hiking expedition through remote Copper Canyon to trail run alongside the Tarahumara. journymexico.com



ALEX WIX

WIX SQUARED, MOROCCO

Whether it's the medina's smartest-looking babouche slippers or Beni Ourain rugs you're after, a trek through the Atlas Mountains or a groovy beachside hideout in Essaouira, Wix—whose mild manner masks razor-sharp taste—has unrivaled local contacts to achieve it. (She lives half the year in Marrakech, where her husband's family runs a *riad*.) With an ever-playful approach, she recently started offering Mystery Travel Trips, surprise holidays for clients guided by "a trail of clues and red herrings." wixsquared.com



MELISSA MATTHEWS

RED SAVANNAH, INDONESIA



Everyone's looking for untouristed Indonesia, and Matthews knows just where to find it: the waterfalls of Lombok, the temples and markets of Java, or aboard a *phinisi* charter near Raja Ampat and the Komodos. If it's Bali or nothing, she'll send you up east to rural Amed, with boat trips to the Nusa Islands. She's fired up about her recent recon trip to Sulawesi, where she'll organize trekking, rafting, and diving, and her guide, a Toradja tribesman, will secret travelers in to witness an elaborate funeral ceremony. redsavannah.com

WILL BOLSOVER

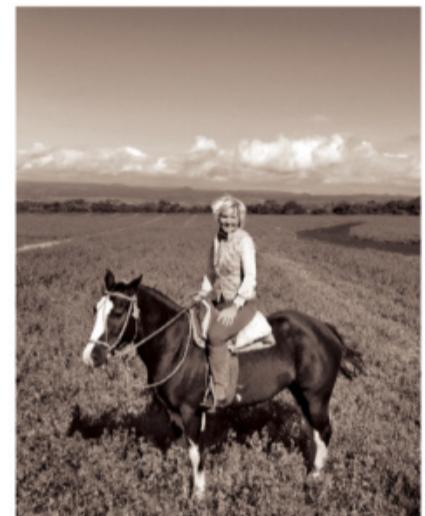
NATURAL WORLD SAFARIS, WILDLIFE

Bolsover exposes guests to the magnetism of animals in the wild across six continents, whether to photograph polar bears on the Svalbard archipelago, track Siberian tigers in Russia's Far East, crouch next to gorillas in Uganda, or peer at lemurs in Madagascar. Easygoing but fiercely committed, he's a founding member of the African Parks Conservation Travel Initiative and leads trips to its reserves, from Congo to Chad. Sleeping arrangements run from tents to handsomely retrofitted ice-breakers. naturalworldsafaris.com

JULES MAURY

SCOTT DUNN, FAMILY TRAVEL

Boundary- (and budget-) pushing parents turn to Maury to craft pan-generational and extraordinary itineraries, like her murder-mystery experience at a castle in Scotland (before taking off on a private jet to the Dolomites to ski), a New Year's Eve dinner in a temple at Angkor Wat, or a heli trip to New Zealand's Alps with fly-bys of 2,000-foot waterfalls and encounters with fur seals. And as an avid skier, sailor, and rider, Maury knows just how to tire out restless teens. scottdunn.com



GWEN KOZLOWSKI

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She can get behind the velvet ropes inside the Strahov Monastery's library in Prague; slip you into Budapest's secret synagogue, or Mies van der Rohe's Villa Tugendhat in the Czech Republic.

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MARC TÉLIO ENTRÉE DESTINATIONS, CANADA

A city boy (Vancouver by way of Montreal), Télio fell hard for the Canadian wilderness, from the craggy shoals of Newfoundland to the pristine beaches of British Columbia's Clayoquot Sound. He'll reliably get your heart pounding while fly-fishing beside grizzly bears in the Yukon Territory, chasing the caribou migration and Northern Lights in Nunavut, exploring the lush foliage of the west coast's rain forests, or spying on polar bears and Arctic foxes at the most northerly lodge on earth (see page 46). His ardor steals your nerves. entreedestinations.com

LINDA ALLEN-SPEER CRUISES BY LINDA, LARGE SHIPS

With 25 years of sailing savvy, Allen-Speer has major clout with lines like Celebrity, Norwegian, Seabourn, and Viking and dives deep into the fit, finishes, and fine print that even the most experienced cruisers don't think to question. cruisesbylinda.com



TOM MARCHANT BLACK TOMATO, ICELAND



Marchant was ahead of the curve when he started running trips to Iceland in 2005, and today he's still pioneering immersive adventures to back-of-the-map regions like the Diamond Circle in the north, where his time-poor, cash-rich clients can meditate in glacial caves or do yoga atop a volcano. This brand of transformational travel is Black Tomato's M.O. on every continent, be it hiking to

Tiger's Nest in Bhutan or heli-skiing in New Zealand's Harris Mountains—all brought into sharp focus with its latest venture, Bring It Back, a program designed to spark existential epiphanies. "I view travel as a powerful tool that can provide answers to the questions we have, address frustrations, and prompt inspiration," says Marchant. blacktomato.com

KATE DOTY
GEOEX, SUPERCHARGED TRIPS

The jetset has Doty, a cool-headed master logician, on speed dial, both for pack-it-in sprints and long fixed-wing journeys across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. She'll zero in on the right exclusive-use property with room for a security detail, or nab an audience with the Dalai Lama. Still, an anti-elitist streak keeps her just as jazzed about sleeping in a tent atop a crater in Virunga.

geoex.com



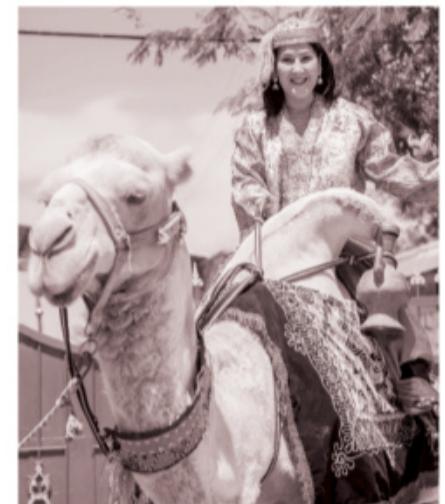
ROSS PHILLIPS TROPICSURF, SURFING

When Phillips started his tiny surf school on the beach of Noosa Heads, Australia, 30 years ago, "the surf-trip norm was a beach bungalow, mosquito net, rice and curry, and no A.C." So he conjured up a new market for luxury surfing. Today, he hires tightly vetted guides in places from Nicaragua to Bali to Papua New Guinea (with his own surf shacks in 17 top hotels). His instructors will do hands-on tow-outs for shaky novices, while for experienced shredders he'll charter a seaplane to hit never-before-surfed breaks in the Maldives or chase the swell charts to "wherever the waves are most pumping." tropicsurf.com



ZULYA RAJABOVA SILK ROAD TREASURE TOURS, CENTRAL ASIA

The Uzbekistan native used to work for the tourism ministry escorting VIPs like Hillary Clinton and Madeleine Albright through the ancient Silk Road cities of Central Asia. Today, with teams in Bukhara and New Jersey, Rajabova decodes "the 'Stans" for her guests—their architecture, traditions, food, and landscape—while smoothing tricky border crossings. She'll rave about their storied heritage—Samarkand's tiled necropolis, the horse culture of Turkmenistan, the lush green gorges of Kyrgyzstan—and make everyone feel at home: One group of clients recently feasted and danced at her niece's wedding. silkroadtreasuretours.com



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MARY JEAN TULLY

TULLY LUXURY TRAVEL, LUXURY SHIPS AND RIVER CRUISES

With the massive volume of business she's done over three decades with lines like Crystal, Oceania, Regent, and Seabourn, Tully has the clout to pull off enviable last-minute upgrades or a cabin on an allegedly fully booked sailing. But it's her dreamy off-the-menu day trips and tack-ons that set her apart, from organizing an orchestra inside an Icelandic volcano to arranging a private lunch for 57 of her clients on the Great Wall of China. tullyluxurytravel.com



AMELIA STEWART

ORIGINAL TRAVEL, GEORGIA

She's plugged in to Tbilisi's coolest boutique hotels and its cutting-edge fashion scene, and is a conduit to Georgian culture: *khinkali*-dumpling-cooking lessons, polyphonic choirs, a village pagan festival.

originaltravel.com

TYLER DILLON

TRUFFLEPIG, MYANMAR AND VIETNAM

Toronto-based Dillon has been running trips to Myanmar for 15 years, even during the toughest travel sanctions, earning him the trust of Pa-O chieftains, Shan princesses, and activists. His guiding in Vietnam is defined by the same tenacity and flair, be it offering a tour of Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum on the back of a Vespa or creating a pop-up hotel in the home of a hill-tribe leader to better access a remote monastery, filling it with crisp linens and crates of French wine. trufflepig.com

ASHTON PALMER

EXPEDITIONTRIPS, SMALL SHIP EXPEDITIONS



Like some sort of throwback adventurer out of a sepia-tone photograph, Palmer has taken more than 100 expeditions around the globe, having spent nearly a decade as a guide, naturalist, conservationist, Zodiac driver, bird-watcher, and photographer in destinations ranging from the Arctic to the

South Pole, the Amazon to the South Pacific. He founded ExpeditionTrips 20 years ago, and today his tight ties with the likes of National Geographic, Ponant, Silversea, and Quark, not to mention ship captains and expedition leaders, mean he can get his clients on the cushiest ice-class vessel for an Antarctica polar adventure by way of Argentina, or on a sleek yacht to the Galápagos with an undersea cabin for turtle watching. expeditiontrips.com

HUW AND ROSELLA BEAUGIÉ

THE THINKING TRAVELLER, MEDITERRANEAN

These husband-wife villa specialists feed the fantasies of Instagram scrollers everywhere with their unrivaled binder of beachfront bungalows, whitewashed masserie, and midcentury gems from Sicily to Corsica. Exceptionally choosy, they sign just 1 percent of houses offered, many by umpteenth-generation families opening their homes for the first time. That means utterly unique stays at a rustic-chic Puglian trullo or an 18th-century wine-producing estate against the backdrop of Mount Etna, all with cooks and drivers as needed. thethinkingtraveller.com



THE SHOPPING HACK "I ALWAYS FIND THE MOST DISTINCTIVE PIECES AT THIS LITTLE VINTAGE SHOP IN SIENA CALLED ALOE&WOLF." DESIGNER ROSETTA GETTY

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MARISOL MOSQUERA

ARACARI TRAVEL, BOLIVIA AND PERU



Lima-based Mosquera's guides have the inside track across the Andes. Her guests can be found happily wandering along the Ancascocha Trek, the rugged alt-route to the crowded Inca Trail; visiting with indigenous textile weavers in the Bolivian city of Sucre; discovering the plunging waterfalls and ancient mummies at Chachapoyas in northern Peru; or shopping Lima's most on-the-pulse boutiques with a local designer. She's got a knack for crafting brilliant multigenerational trips; cruising through the quieter western Galápagos with visits to local communities, say, or hiking the sloping Sierra Nevada volcano. aracari.com



BRIAN PEARSON

UPSCAPE, CHILE

He's mapped out all of his company's bike routes through Chile's wine country, runs the region's only Snowcat-skiing rig, and pitches his domed tents in Patagonia's wild Aysén region.

upscapetravel.com

HENRIETTA LOYD

CAZENOYE+LOYD, AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

An unflappable Brit with a talent for Getting Stuff Done, Loyd used to run safari lodges in Botswana and has been traveling to Africa for some 40 years. With her prolific and persuasive networking, she pulls off those small but trip-defining "random acts of expertise," as she calls them, like swimming with the seals in Hout Bay alongside a scientist and photographer, or arranging visits to see rescue cheetahs. Lately she's fallen for the Middle East, especially Jordan, where she'll arrange a Bedouin-style feast in Wadi Rum and visits to sparkingly empty heritage sites beyond Petra. cazloyd.com



SEAN NELSON

OMAN EXPEDITIONS, OMAN



Nelson can handle harsh conditions—he spent years with the Sultan of Oman's Desert Regiment—but found his calling orchestrating more luxurious schemes,

like pitching mobile camps deep in the heart of the Rub Al Khali desert, complete with copper washbasins and fluffy towels for on-demand hot showers. He works with Oman's most respected historians, archaeologists, astronomers, and naturalists, keeping his ear to the ground so that when a lake appears in the desert after a hard rain, his clients will be taken to swim before it dries—along with a lavish picnic lunch. omanexpeditions.com



TANYA DALTON

GREAIVES TRAVEL, INDIA

She's a red-lipsticked Indophile with a cultivated-from-childhood expertise not only on the secret temples of Tamil Nadu but also the complex social whirl of the Cartier Concours d'Elegance. From access to exclusive private homes and famous authors who'll guide for a day to principal wildlife experts, trusted chauffeurs, and Sufis who can unlock the mysteries of the cosmos, Dalton knows how to do India right—including traveling by nimble mobile camps to seek out more rugged regions, like Ladakh. And at the end of it all, she'll make sure there's time to relax before heading home. A Pool Pavilion suite at the Amanbagh in Rajasthan, perhaps? greavestravel.com



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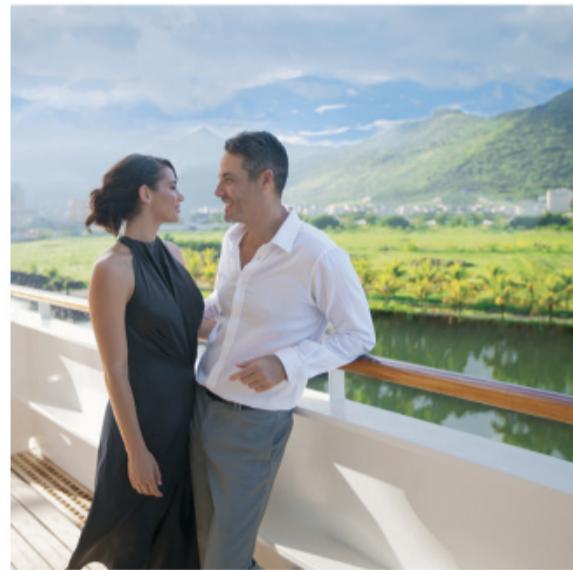
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Mary Jean Tully, Founder & CEO
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Renegade Master

GOA IS THE REBEL-ROUSING BEACH ESCAPE THAT BECAME TRANCE CENTRAL FOR A GENERATION. THESE DAYS THERE'S A MUCH SHARPER SCENE, BUT ONE THAT REMAINS DEFIANTLY INDEPENDENT

BY STANLEY STEWART. PHOTOGRAPHS BY OLIVER PILCHER





EVERY TIME I HAVE COME HERE, there seem to be no guests, only the empty ramparts, the silent rooms of elegant furniture, the café tables with the finest view in India. It allows the illusion that I have unearthed this place, that it is my secret. The guard struggles to his feet to salute as I pass through the gatehouse. Taking the sun on the steps of the old church that squats in the courtyard, the receptionist nods. The waiter hovers by a table, as if summoned just for this moment. He leans forward. “The kingfish was caught earlier this morning,” he whispers. “Delicious with the coconut sauce.”

I think of myself as a regular—though I have dined here only three times, almost eight years apart. On each occasion, I have expected to find Fort Tiracol “discovered.” I picture guests, busy tables, stylish people from Delhi and New York. But each time I have had the place to myself, the staff seemingly awaiting my return.

If you think of Goa as being overwhelmed with ravers and tourists, think again. There are dozens of Goas: Some are exclusive, others as secretive as a pirate’s map, some a beachcomber’s dream of a cabin, empty dunes, and pounding surf. A former Portuguese colony isolated in British India, Goa is India’s Latin Quarter. It is tolerant and capricious. It is a little degenerate, a little decadent. It has that easygoing lassitude found on tropical coasts from Costa Rica to Zanzibar. Goans speak about India as if it were a separate country and Indians as if they were another people. Where India has gaudy temples and adobe villages, Goa has whitewashed churches and crumbling Portuguese villas.

Like any self-respecting Latin Quarter, this place is full of people who have escaped: runaways, romantics, bohemians, accountants

GOANS SPEAK ABOUT INDIA AS IF IT WERE A SEPARATE COUNTRY AND INDIANS AS IF THEY WERE ANOTHER PEOPLE

on the lam, speedsters who ran out of road, hoteliers who have checked out, chefs chasing coconuts, socialites seeking siestas. Everyone I meet seems to have some story of throwing off the shackles of their old life for the sea breezes of laissez-faire Goa.

My new friends at Casa Xetio try to explain. Casa Xetio is the kind of drinking den you might find on a backstreet in Lisbon: five tables in a tiny room, shelves of dusty bottles, a congenial gathering of tippling philosophers. They talk of *susegad*. The proprietor, a big man with a big laugh, says it is just another word for laziness. His customers have a more nuanced take. It comes from the Portuguese word *sossegado*, meaning “quiet,” they say. But this doesn’t do it justice. Ordering another round of *feni*, the local rocket fuel made from cashew fruit, they explain it implies a relaxed attitude: Take your time, enjoy life, be happy. Carefree, that’s *susegad*.

The Portuguese took their time in Goa, profiting from the spice trade for almost 500 years until they finally relinquished the colony to India in 1961. A few years later the hippies arrived. Their *susegad* involved a sarong, a spliff, a hammock, and several half-baked ideas about spirituality. Artists were drawn by the light, ravers came for the trance parties. As word got out, people said that Goa had been spoiled. People were wrong. I set off in search of those other Goas—the secretive, the exclusive, the ones that are still a beachcomber’s dream, that still offer a sense of discovery.

Right: Out on Ashvem Beach. Opposite, clockwise from top left:

Rangeela concept store; the living room at Shunya Noi Varo in North Goa; the Chapel of St. Sebastian; the music room at Ahilya by the Sea hotel. *Previous pages, from left:* A beach hut at Anahata Retreat; Ahilya









I RENT A SCOOTER AND HEAD DOWN BACK ROADS, behind the famous beaches of North Goa—Arambol, Mandrem, Ashvem, and Morjim—flickering in and out of palm-tree shadows. I stop at Braganza House, a family mansion turned museum. The long galleries and high-ceilinged rooms contain the treasures of a vanished imperial age, when the Portuguese empire spanned the globe from South America to Southeast Asia: Ming vases, Brazilian lacework, gilt chairs that were gifts from the royal family. “And we have a most important relic,” the daughter of the family says, indicating the chapel. “The fingernail of St. Francis Xavier.” This too is Goa.

In the south, five-star hotels dominate the coast, with glamorous pools and restaurants. Inland, old Portuguese residences are turned into boutique retreats deep in the palm groves. Up north, beyond the dreary towns of Calangute and Baga, beachside properties still have the old magic of free-spirited Goa, still imbued with susegad.

I dine with Jivi Sethi in his beautifully refurbished villa in the pretty northern village of Assagao. Entrepreneur, designer, and chef, Jivi has been part of the bohemian fabric of Goa since the 1970s but has long since outgrown its limitations. He is what Goa has become: stylish, cosmopolitan, slightly louche, and enormous fun. Over dinner—a succession of delicious curries, punctuated by cooling sorbets—Jivi and I discuss Lisbon bars, the Inquisition, Mughal gardens, and ghazels (the great tradition of Urdu poetry set to music) as we listen to crackling recordings of Begum Akhtar in the moonlight. Goa is an escape, Jivi says with a sigh, pouring a glass of Licor Armada, “a place where there is time to remember what is important in life.” The evening ends at Thalassa, a raucous beachfront bar,

IT HAS THAT EASYGOING LASSITUDE FOUND ON TROPICAL COASTS FROM COSTA RICA TO ZANZIBAR

where waiters provide us with a table overlooking the pearlescent sea. Someone dances on the counter, someone runs naked into the waves, someone weeps on the shoulder of a friend, someone joins the band to sing a rousing rendition of “Volare.” This too is Goa.

By the 17th century, Old Goa was one of the richest and finest cities in Asia, said to be larger than London or Paris. It was also one of the most decadent. I blame the unbuttoning influence of the tropics and the distance from disapproving eyes back home. The French apothecary Jean Moquet blamed the devil. Visiting in 1609, he listed 25 sins common among Goans, including homicide, gluttony, drunkenness, voluptuousness, sodomy, lechery, fornication, adultery, and the breaking of oaths.

But the Goa to which I have returned is the one of the empty beach, a small house alone on the sand. It’s one of four available to guests on the family compound of Denzil Sequeira, a Mumbai-based fashion photographer—a wild coastal property aptly named Elsewhere. I follow a track through the palms to a small, rust-colored building. The rooms are furnished with sea chests and carved four-posters. Bands of reflected sunlight dance on the walls. On the beach, there is no one around. I watch the sun set over the Arabian Sea, and swim among silver waves uncurling beneath a new moon. When I emerge from the water, the only light on the shore is glowing from the porch of my little house in the dunes. T

From top: Feasting at Gunpowder; cocktails at Anahata Retreat.

Opposite: Casa Tota in Assagao. Previous pages, clockwise from top left: Ashvem Beach; the bay near Ahilya by the Sea; the view from Siolim bridge; playing volleyball on Ashvem Beach







GOA: THE LOWDOWN

WHERE TO STAY

AHILYA BY THE SEA, NERUL

Overlooking a bay of fishing boats and playful dolphins, this is the sister property of Ahilya Fort in Maheshwar. Smart and elegant, it still manages to have that beach-house vibe, with shutters opening onto the Arabian Sea. Containing nine suites and airy sitting rooms, it is full of books, deep sofas, antique furniture, and an impressively eclectic art collection. In the gardens, two pools are buttressed by the sea wall. By evening, tables dotted around the lantern-lit terraces are as romantic as a handwritten billet-doux. This may be one of the quietest corners in Goa, yet in one direction are the buzzing bars and restaurants of Candolim, while in the other is bustling Panjim. ahilyabythesea.com. Doubles from about \$336

THE POSTCARD HOTELS

When a new, homegrown hotel brand debuted late last year, it did so by launching three low-key hideaways across the state. There's the Postcard Velha, a sleek eight-room escape among the crumbling churches of Old Goa; the Postcard Cuelim, with views over a string of emerald paddy fields in an overlooked South Goan village (though the attention-grabber here is the 350-year-old chapel); and the nine-room Postcard Moira, set in a restored 214-year-old Portuguese mansion not far from the trendy village of Assagao and popular North Goan beaches of Anjuna and Vagator. postcardresorts.com. Doubles from about \$200

FORT TIRACOL HERITAGE HOTEL

This former Portuguese fort has the best location in Goa, commanding a headland at the mouth of the Tiracol River; if you come on the back roads behind Querim Beach, you get to cross the river on the flatbed ferry before driving to the hotel through the village. Wildly atmospheric, the fort has only seven rooms. There are terrific views from the ramparts, and a church is squeezed into the courtyard. New managers—the heritage property is leased by the government—have given it a sympathetic spruce-up. forttiracol.in. Doubles from about \$105

VIVENDA DOS PALHAÇOS, MAJORDA

Owned by siblings Charlotte and Simon Hayward, both born in India, the modest mansion is aptly named “villa of clowns” in Portuguese; a waggish sense of humor is the mood of this quirky renovation. The charm of the owners and their basset hound, the inimitable Gigalo, gives Vivenda the feeling of an extended house party. Guests often have supper together at the long dining room table after predinner drinks in the tiny Lorry-Back Bar. Don’t miss the cashew feni made by priests at a local monastery. vivendagoa.com. Doubles from about \$75

ELSEWHERE, MANDREM

There is no spa, no Acqua di Parma toiletries, no room service. There isn’t even a sign. Some of the guests are the unfortunate types who attract the paparazzi, and privacy is important here. As is authenticity. Little has changed at this family retreat since it was bought by the great grandfather of Denzil Sequeira in 1886 for the equivalent of 42 rupees. A path leads to a creaky bamboo bridge across a river that isolates Elsewhere from the rest of the coast. Scattered among the dunes are five houses and three candy-colored tents. The tents are more like glamping, the houses renovated like a Greek-island hideout: blue and terra-cotta walls, draped four-posters, shuttered windows. aseascape.com. Beach house from about \$160; tent from about \$40

A FEW MORE LOVELY LITTLE PLACES

Anahata Retreat (anahataretreat.com; doubles from about \$100). Casa Tota (grahamandgreen.co.uk; sleeps up to six; from about \$800 per week). Coco Shambhala (cocoshambhala.com; from about \$2,500 per villa per week). Frangipani (frangipanigoa.com; sleeps up to 10; from about \$385 per night). Shunya Noi Varo (shunyachi.com; doubles from about \$100)

WHERE TO EAT

BOMRAS, CANDOLIM

In the unlikely sprawl of bars and shops along the main strip in Candolim, chef Bawmra Jap has created a fusion menu that combines elements of Southeast Asian cuisine—he is originally from Myanmar—with international influences picked up from working in London for years. But it is the atmosphere as much as the food that makes Bomras a hit: It is the kind of place where you feel like a regular on your first visit. The slow-roasted pork is justly famous. And the food miles on the delicious crab-and-mango salad can be measured in inches; the mangoes have dropped from the trees above your head. bomras.com. About \$40 for two

SUNBEAM, ASSAGAO

Not a restaurant but a private-dining experience. Dinner at Jivi Sethi’s beautifully restored Portuguese mansion is a visual as well as a culinary treat, served on the pool terrace. The menus are eclectic and wonderfully surprising, plus there are two suites to crash in afterward, so you can try Goa’s best breakfast the following day. justjivi.com. From \$50 for two

LA PLAGE, ASHVEM BEACH

The queen bee of the beach-shack joints, this spot brings French sophistication to the whole tables-on-the-sand thing. Arrive from the road to walk through a small enclave of stylish boutiques—Sanskriti, Yashu e Prem, the Bohemian Project—selling cool beachwear, shabby-chic antiques, and wacky miscellany. Or come along the beach from Morjim to pass Jade Jagger’s jewelry emporium. Dig your toes into the warm sand while ordering crispy sardines and sesame-coated tuna. Billowing muslin frames views of the ocean, a few yards away, and it is not even a staggering distance to the sun loungers for a postprandial nap. About \$15 for two

DIVA GOA, CALANGUTE

For India’s smallest state, Goa lays claim to an impressively high density of the country’s best restaurants—so it’s hardly surprising that celebrated chef Ritu Dalmia chose the region for the first outpost of her Diva restaurant empire outside of New Delhi. Her Italian food was such a hit in India that in 2017 she ventured westward to open Cittamani, an Indian-Italian fusion restaurant in the heart of Milan; now, at her Goa foray, in a chic black-and-white dining room at the new Andores Resort & Spa in Calangute, you’ll find a menu brimming with wood-fired pizzas, chicken skewers crusted in Parmesan served with chile jam, and paccheri with roasted zucchini, prawns, and limoncello. Save room for dessert—her tiramisu is a star attraction. andoresresortandspa.com/diva. About \$100 for two

GUNPOWDER, ASSAGAO

Chef Satish Warier relocated from Delhi five years ago to a relaxed life in a renovated Portuguese villa. He focuses on regional dishes from South India: the toddy-shop fish curry from Kerala is better than anything you’ve tried in Cochin, and the Andhra Pradesh sweet-and-sour pumpkin is extraordinarily good. Service is friendly and informal, tables are candlelit and spill into the gardens, and the food is worth flying for. About \$15 for two

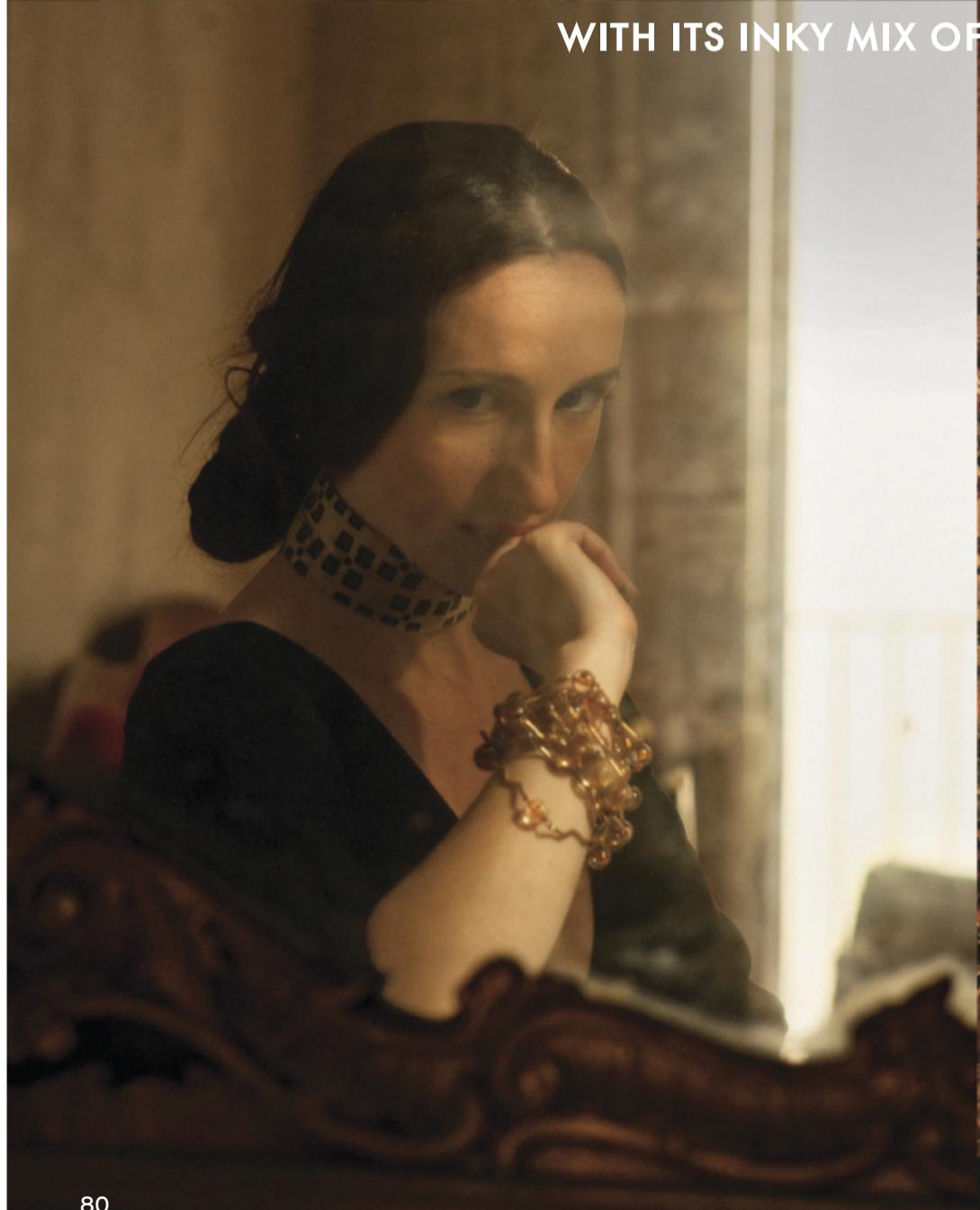
Tanya Dalton is a third-generation director of Greaves Tours, with a deep knowledge of the Indian subcontinent. A nine-night trip to Goa, from \$1,850 per person (double occupancy), includes domestic flights into and out of Goa, transfers, and a one-day heritage walking tour of Old Goa, with three nights at Elsewhere and six nights at Ahilya by the Sea. 800-318-7801; greavesindia.com

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The porch at Frangipani villa in Siolim; a villa bedroom; Coco Shambhala hideaway in Nerul; curios at Casa Tota

Clockwise: Piazza Verdi; a trattoria table on Via Sammartino; grilled sea bass at Zia Pina restaurant; a notepaper chandelier at BB22; a bakery on Via Porta Carini; an interior stairway; the Cuticchio puppet theater on Via Bara all'Olivella; artist and musician Lucrezia Testa Iannilli

CAN'T GET YOU

WITH ITS INKY MIX OF GRIT AND GRANDEUR, PALERMO INSPIRES

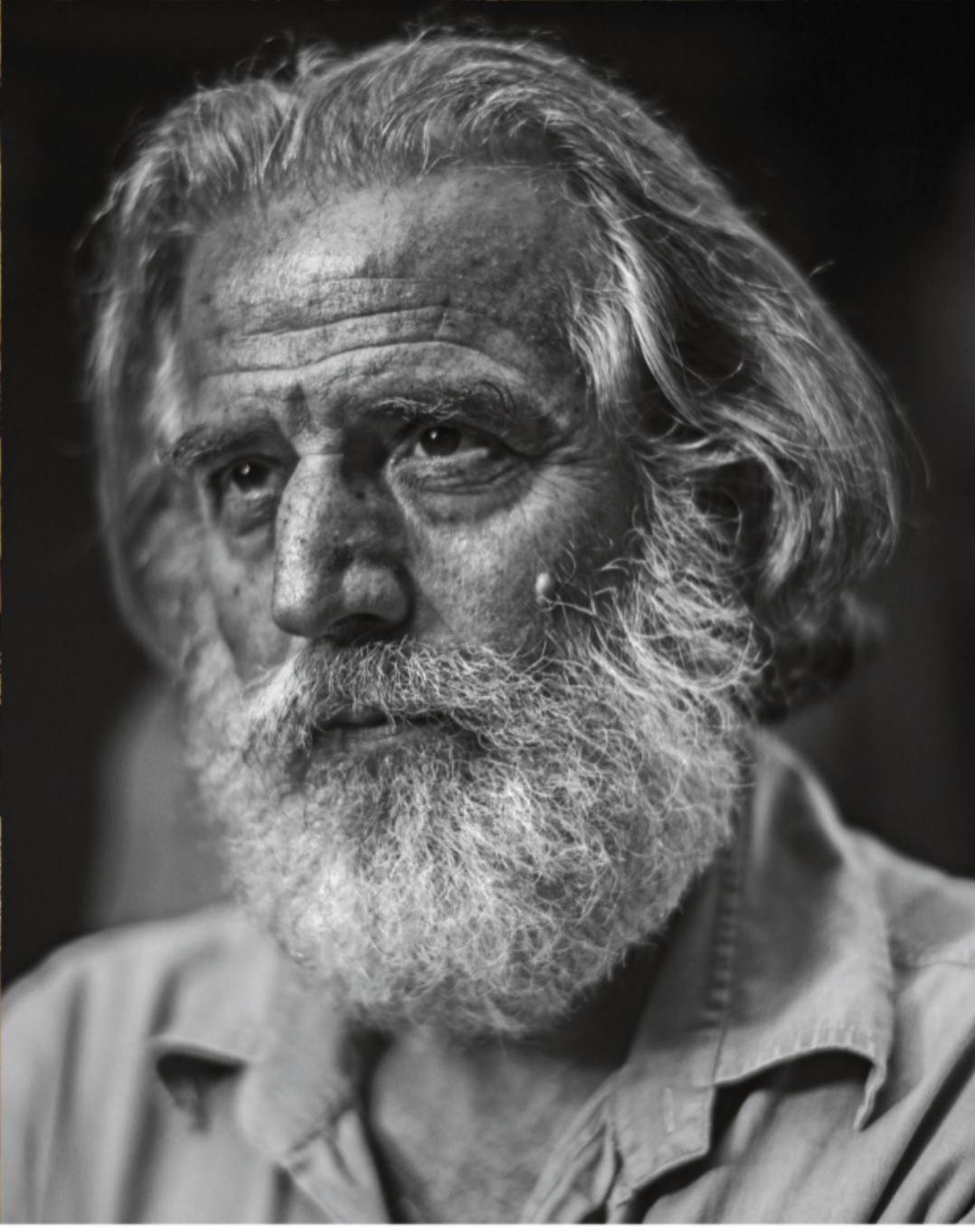




OUT OF MY HEAD

OBSessive Devotion. By Antonia Quirke. Photographs by Bill Phelps





PART PUNIC, PART PHOENICIAN, part Roman, part Arab, the city of Palermo is strong stuff. Snugly spectacular in its bay setting by Sicily's Monte Pellegrino, it looks, as a *garibaldino* approaching it from the sea once said, like a city imagined by a poetic child. Colorful relics of Middle Eastern domination mix with the Norman and Baroque, so the back of a building might look entirely different from its front or sides. This has always struck me as impeccably gallant: an acceptance of this, a pragmatic incorporation of that. Beauty, rot, and salvage. Renaissance palaces next to hovels, 194 churches, and the domed roofs of onetime mosques—all reminders of countless invaders. History is a tumble, a chaos.

Sunbathing one afternoon in the roofless remains of a Greek temple that sit by the pool at the Grand Hotel Villa Igiea as casually as a plastic café chair on a sidewalk, I noticed that someone had drilled holes through its ancient columns to fix an electric plug for a minibar. Momentarily, I was outraged. But as a cloud of cabbage butterflies glided past a fellow guest on his lounger, time thickened with that drugging Sicilian intensity that comes on as though gigantic pyres have been lit on the surrounding hills, and I lost track of my indignation.

In Palermo things happen slowly. Only once have I noticed something abruptly change. Suddenly, a few years ago, everyone started smoking roll-ups rather than the government-subsidized cigarettes that overnight had been ruinously inflated in price. But even this change seemed immediately eternal. Roll-ups suit Palermo better anyway—the unpacking of the tobacco, the painstaking parting of the sweat-ruined Rizla in the August damp.

In the hot months, you notice the city's rampant dereliction more. Streets and squares in the historic center, still shattered from the 1943 bombardments, spill their rubble like the innards of pillows, leaving little trails even into the famous La Vucciria market with its stalls selling Slinkies and pigs' trotters. In the collapsed Piazza Garraffello, you'll find an anatomically immaculate, gigantic beating heart graffitied on the wall opposite what was once an elegant bank. Beyond a stretch of myrtle hedges near the Via Roma, outside the Conservatorio di Musica Vincenzo Bellini, students sit on 17th-century stone slabs, gripping their oboe cases, murmuring to one another, heads touching.

Where am I now? I'm lost. Toss the map for a start. There may be a lovely simplicity to the old city's layout—two straight, perpendicular roads dividing everything into four quarters—but my three maps each tell me something different, especially when the streets condense in the southeast, toward the tough and ancient Albergheria quarter, into alleys where teenage

boys race their boxer dogs alongside pimped-out scooters. Here I saw a man leading a harness-free, sun-tired horse past the unexpected gold of an acacia tree into a dim Moorish courtyard, his fingers scratching its nose.

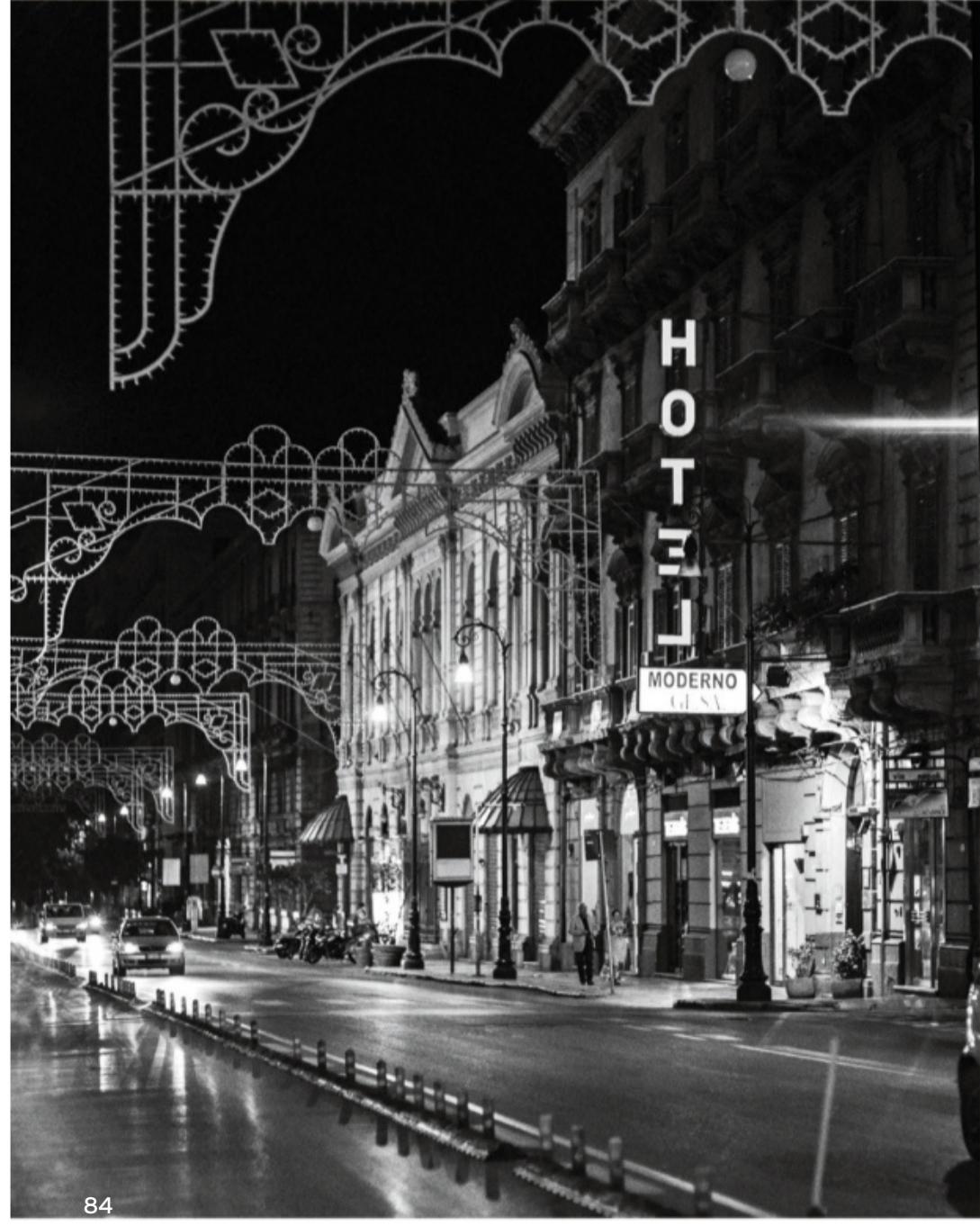
Horses are everywhere in Palermo. On the highways in the early morning they are raced illegally, the survivors left to gently plod tourists in comfy little carriages to and from the Catacombe dei Cappuccini, where the embalmed corpses of monks and city prelates hang from hooks like damaged puppets. One such tour, through the shabby grandeur of the streets radiating from the Quattro Canti—a rounded intersection of elaborate balconies and cornices—which should have lasted 30 minutes, becomes an hour (construction, milling pedestrians), and a furious argument rages between driver and tourist. The level of aggro is raised to such a pitch that the police get involved, sauntering off their motorbikes and making such flamboyant gestures you feel sure it will end with a fist fight. But as usual it dissipates to nothing, overlooked, as everything in this city is, by stone saints and shrines to the Virgin, who is to be found even in the knife shop off the Piazza Caracciolo with her eyes raised in a peasant's ecstasy, surrounded by a halo of candles and meat cleavers. *And to our petitions let answer be given.*

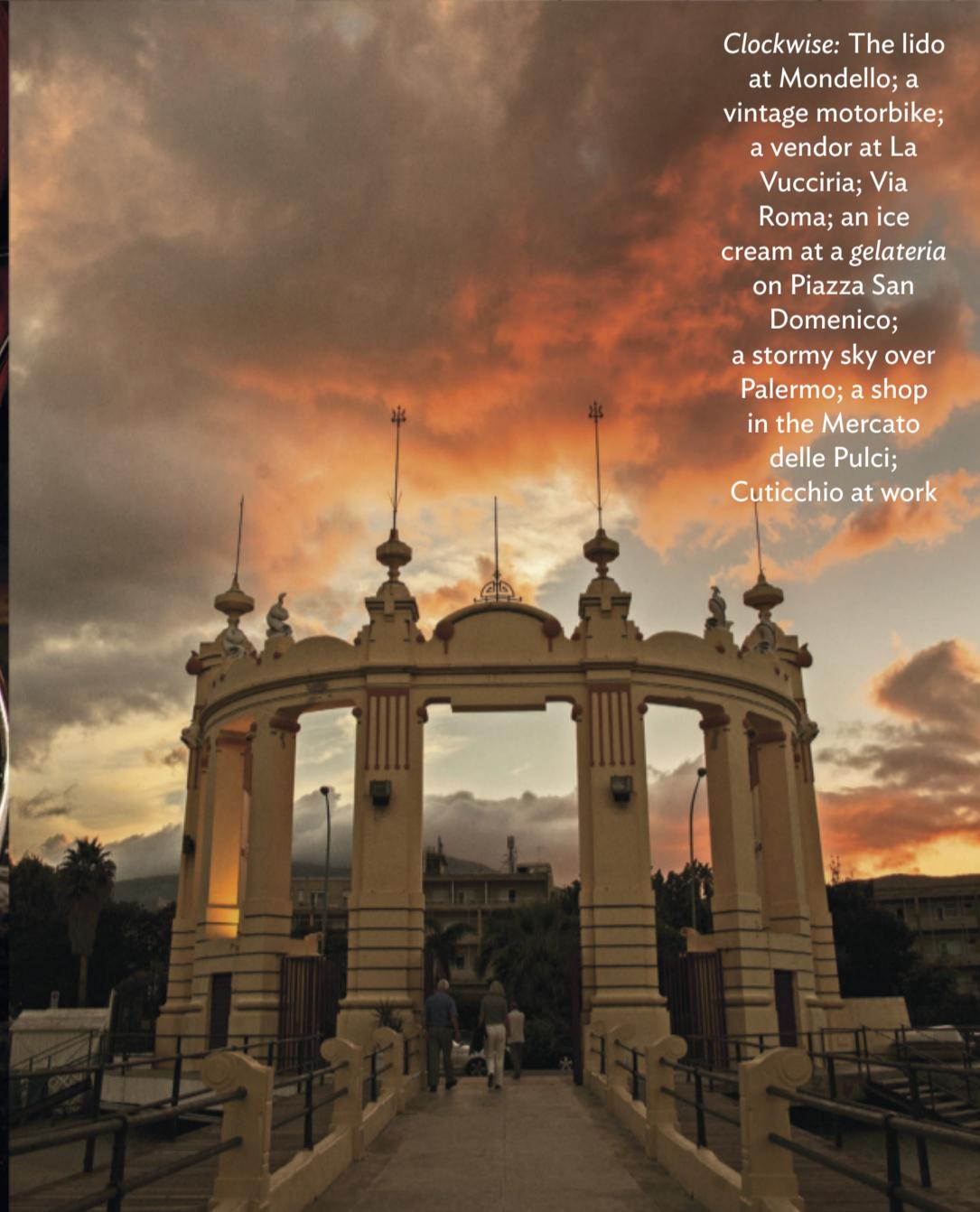
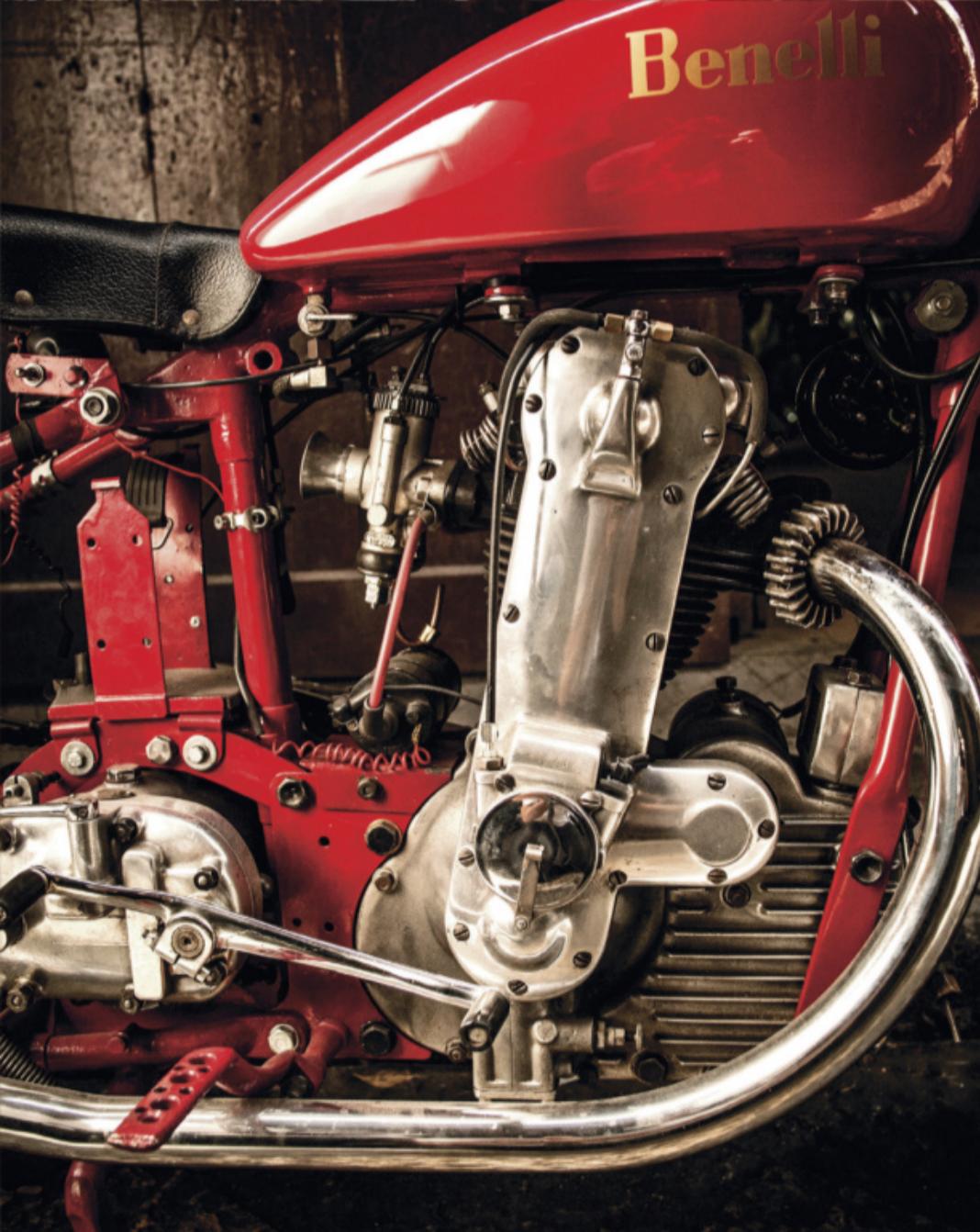
I SAW A MAN LEADING A HARNESS-FREE, SUN-TIRED HORSE PAST THE UNEXPECTED GOLD OF AN ACACIA TREE, HIS FINGERS SCRATCHING ITS NOSE

MY FRIENDS LUCA AND DOMENICO tell me that whenever they pass a derelict building in the city, they feel a mounting rage. To a foreigner, such a thing is an absurdly romantic prop of the past, but to a Sicilian it is an expression of the foulest moral decay. The Mafia, which had controlled so much of the construction industry here, are gradually losing their grip. And not a moment too soon. They would raze the entire city to the ground if they could, rages Domenico, and stick up a forest of brutalist high-rises, like they already have in what remains of the fragrant olive and lemon groves that once enclosed the old city walls.

In the afternoon, off the Piazza della Kalsa, just steps from the marina where the prince in *The Leopard* rode his carriage in the moonlight, I stop to watch the evening begin. At 4 P.M. come the swallows in a rapid, swooping carnival. At 5 P.M. a man starts frying cockles in a cauldron. At 6 P.M. Signore Ciccio makes his chickpea pancakes for 10 cents each, and people line up to transport bags of them away on Vespas. At 7 P.M. fresh swordfish is put on ice and lanterns are lit outside restaurants in readiness for early diners. From the open doors of a nearby church comes the sound of choir

Opposite, clockwise from top left: An alleyway near the cathedral; a city view from Monte Pellegrino; actor, theater director, and puppeteer Mimmo Cuticchio; lace for sale at the Mercato del Capo





Clockwise: The lido at Mondello; a vintage motorbike; a vendor at La Vucciria; Via Roma; an ice cream at a gelateria on Piazza San Domenico; a stormy sky over Palermo; a shop in the Mercato delle Pulci; Cuticchio at work

practice, going over phrases imperfectly, studiously. A waiter tells me that this is the choir of Father Mario, a priest once cherished for his ability to heal, for the laying on of hands—a mystic even. A few years earlier he had been sent to prison for refusing to tell the police what had been revealed to him in confession by mafiosi. “He has changed,” says the waiter solemnly. “Now he is sad.”

Struck by their seriousness in contrast to the wacky Neapolitans, I once asked Luca if he thought Sicilians were pessimistic. “Oh, no,” he said, carefully shaking his head, “not pessimistic. But our wisdom lies in expecting the worst.” You can feel this grief in the churches. The statue of a spindly, begging Christ with welts on his knees in La Gancia on Via Alloro. The 1485 fake head in a glass case a couple of chapels along, made to look like Christ immersed in a fathomless sleep. In Palermo they love nothing more than a stricken Jesus, and a cherub, thighs rippling with so much fat you can hardly believe that mere cement keeps the creature stuck on. Even the food here tastes extra visceral. The spleen sandwiches. The caponata made with eggplant the color of deep bruises, simmered until its skin eases

all of them model-perfect—there is zero body fascism in southern Italy—but imperious. The boys hold themselves more shyly, infinitely younger-seeming, figuring out their attack.

In Sicily, says Luca, the girls are a nightmare. “*Mio dio*,” he sighs, “the bowing and scraping required, the declarations of eternal love—really they think they smell like paradise, it’s just ridiculous.” I console him with ice cream flavored a tooth-raspingly sweet and complicated double-caramel nougat. “Better than Naples?” Luca challenges. I nod. “Let them have their pizzas,” he mutters.

Ice cream is worshiped in Palermo, where many even claim it was invented. In betting shops, hardened gamblers stand in front of TV screens with eyes screwed up in anxiety, frantically licking cones. In café after café, businessmen thrash out deals over hilariously fluted, whipped-creamed *nostra coppas*. At Ilardo, moments from the Piazza Santo Spirito, or at La Preferita, farther into town, mothers and daughters lean against walls silently eating brioche buns filled with mint chocolate chip, intent only on finding any precious drips.

After such a cold binge, the warm glow of Palermo’s stone hits the eye anew. The city was once known as the granary of ancient Rome—wheat was grown in vast estates outside the walls—and it’s as though the shimmering crop long ago cast the whole place a golden yellow. There’s no remedy for it, especially during the blindingly bright dog days, but to walk as far as your limp will take you, through the Piazza Magione with its lushly flowered cloister, and marvel at how in the middle of this crammed city you can suddenly feel as though you are in some remote Persian village, legs aching amid dust and dried roses. Then out onto busy Via Giuseppe Garibaldi, past the cabinet-makers’ workshops and garages, faded palaces and emporiums piled with panamas and trilbies (how Palermo adores a hat). Only here and in Rajasthan have I seen shops entirely devoted to mending the wheels on suitcases or the rope soles on canvas shoes.

Palermo pulls you along with smells of roasting coffee and rotting boxes of oleanders. Street soccer games divide to let you pass, and housewives lower baskets from their high apartments down to fishmongers, sarcastically haggling five stories up into the windless air. This is the world’s best city to be lost in, the best place to be aimless. Sooner or later you’ll find a main street, or recognize the man who sells dried persimmons, or the museum with the wall painting by the Inquisition-tormented sailor accused of romancing a mermaid. This is a city that becomes familiar far faster than others, and with such a weirdly vivid intimacy it’s as though you had been here before, and each step and turn is already a memory. 

IN BETTING SHOPS, HARDENED GAMBLERS STAND IN FRONT OF TV SCREENS WITH EYES SCREWED UP IN ANXIETY, FRANTICALLY LICKING ICE CREAM CONES

away like a stocking in your mouth, leaving just the tanned flesh that always feels slightly like cannibalism. Wild mulberries in the Ballardò market. Still-bleeding tuna. Squashed figs and honey as rust dark as henna.

Once, on a flight to the city during a blustery February, the woman across from me recited the Rosary from takeoff to landing, pausing only to buy a scratch card from the flight attendant, nodding sagely when the purchase proved to be a dud. “In Naples,” Domenico says, “all hell is sure to break loose, but they know it will be okay. In Palermo we just pray all hell doesn’t break loose in the first place.”

DRIVE 25 MINUTES out of the city in spring to the fishing village of Sferracavallo, and eat fresh sea-urchin spaghetti while watching the multi-colored fishing boats rocking so intensely beyond the sharp rocks that when you finally get up to leave you walk with a sailor’s roll.

A little closer to town is the resort of Mondello, where wealthy *palermiani* came in the late 1900s and built elegant weekend villas, and where from June to October crowds of school-free teenagers hang off of changing huts, buying ice cream at the *gelateria* Latte Pa. Fourteen-year-old girls with salt-mussed hair snaking down their slim backs stand about, not

Opposite, clockwise from top left:
A rocking-horse workshop on Via IV Aprile; fish at a harborfront stall; a monk walking along Corso Vittorio Emanuele; Cuticchio’s hands



Clockwise:

A street-corner shrine; Giuliano von Escher, son of Palermo-based furniture designer Alfred von Escher; restaurant tables on Via Torremuzza; an old car in the city



THE PICK OF PALERMO

WHERE TO STAY

Palermo is not known for its hotels, but there is one rather fabulous exception: the Grand Hotel Villa Igziea, which will be updated and added to the Rocco Forte collection in 2020. It's full of old-world seaside glamour with its ballrooms lined in hand-painted frescoes and ocean-view pool, and is walking distance from the city center and promenade. (43 Salita Belmonte; villa-igziea.com; doubles from \$200)

THE LOCALS' MARKET

Almost all guidebooks will send visitors to explore La Vucciria food market. It's overpriced and swarming with English speakers; avoid it. Instead, go early to Ballarò, where cacophonous vendors squawk out prices for whole swordfish, ginormous Sicilian eggplant, and mounds of olives that range from brightest green to purply black. (1 Via Ballarò)

A THEATER TO RIVAL LA SCALA

Italy's largest opera house was once a hotbed of Mafia control and corruption. Today, Teatro Massimo symbolizes Palermo's cultural and political renaissance, with programming that includes open-air performances of *The Barber of Seville* and *Pagliacci*. The 1897 building, with its palm-studded courtyard, gilded auditorium, and roof terrace with 360-degree views to the sea and old town, is worth a visit in itself. ([Piazza Verdi; teatromassimo.it](http://teatromassimo.it))

THE BEST STREET FOOD

Arancini may hail from the port city of Catania, but the lines that zigzag between the stalls for the golden fried, softball-size versions at Palermo's Capo market suggest the best are found here (the balls stuffed with peas and meat are irresistible). A more classic palermitani snack, the market's *pani câ meusa* (spleen-and-ricotta sandwich) is a heap of tender meat in a small, soft bun that sops up the juices. ([Via Cappuccinelle](http://ViaCappuccinelle))

THE ART OUTING

Sixteen years ago Francesco Pantaleone opened FPAC, one of southern Italy's only contemporary art galleries, on the Quattro Canti, to showcase Sicilian artists and works from top international talent (he's since added a branch in Milan). Francesco himself may be on hand to lead guests to his father's shop next door, which contains the most staggering stash of religious relics, including rosaries, statuettes, and elaborate vestments. (303 Via Vittorio Emanuele; fpac.it)

THE ALL-DAY CAFÉ

Beloved by the palermitani, family-run Bisso Bistrot is tucked into the Libreria Dante bookshop, with simple wooden tables, interiors by renowned artist Salvatore Gregorietti, and an extensive menu featuring their exceptional *pasta alla Norma*. (172A Via Maqueda; bissobistrot.it; about \$35 for two for lunch)

MUST-TRY APERITIVO

At In Vinoveritas, a sleek, cheerful wine bar off central Via Dante Alighieri, the walls are lined with Italian bottles, outdoor terraces are packed before sunset, and a decidedly grown-up antipasto menu of seared local scallops, grilled octopus, and an open-air oyster bar may spoil dinner plans. Fill your glass with anything from Donnafugata to Etna's Tasca d'Almerita vines. (29 Via Sammartino; about \$25 for wine and snacks)

LINENS TO TAKE HOME

Reached through an archway and up a staircase within an old palace, Salvatore Parlato Tessuti is one of Palermo's most enduring shops, loaded with silks, cottons, tablecloths, and other housewares. It's around the corner from Palazzo Valguarnera-Gangi, whose ballroom was featured in *The Leopard*; visits can be arranged in advance. (8 Piazza Croce dei Vespi; parlatotessuti.it)

TOP-TIER ANTIQUING

The bottom half of main street Vittorio Emanuele is a trove of sophisticated little antiques shops and artisans' ateliers. A favorite is Antichità Athena, which sells coral and religious items out back. And the sprawling, excellent Mercato delle Pulci is open daily; its warren of stalls display hand-painted espresso sets, antique clocks, jewelry boxes, and just about anything you can imagine some long-lost Sicilian grandmother keeping in her home.

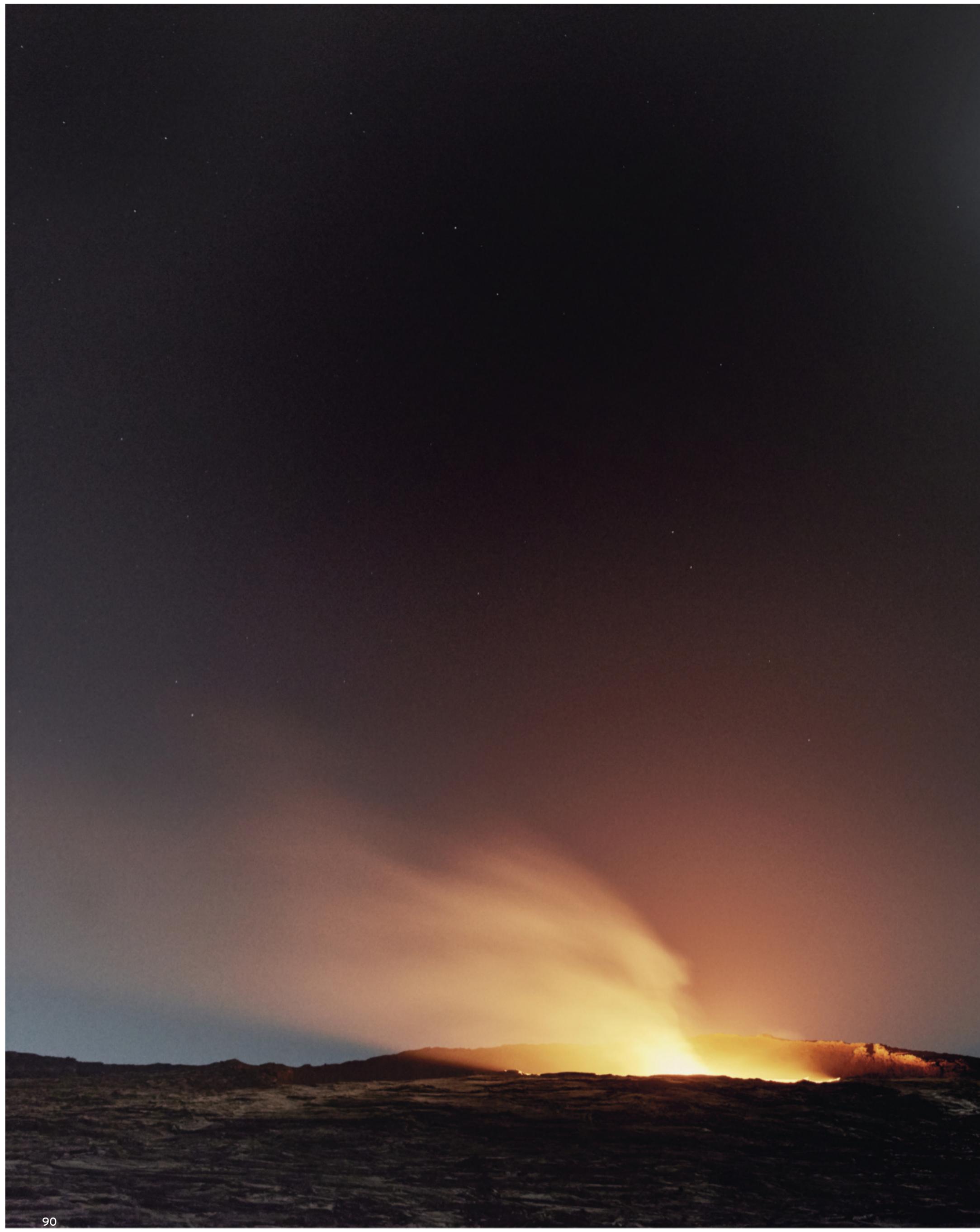
PASTA TO BLOW YOUR MIND

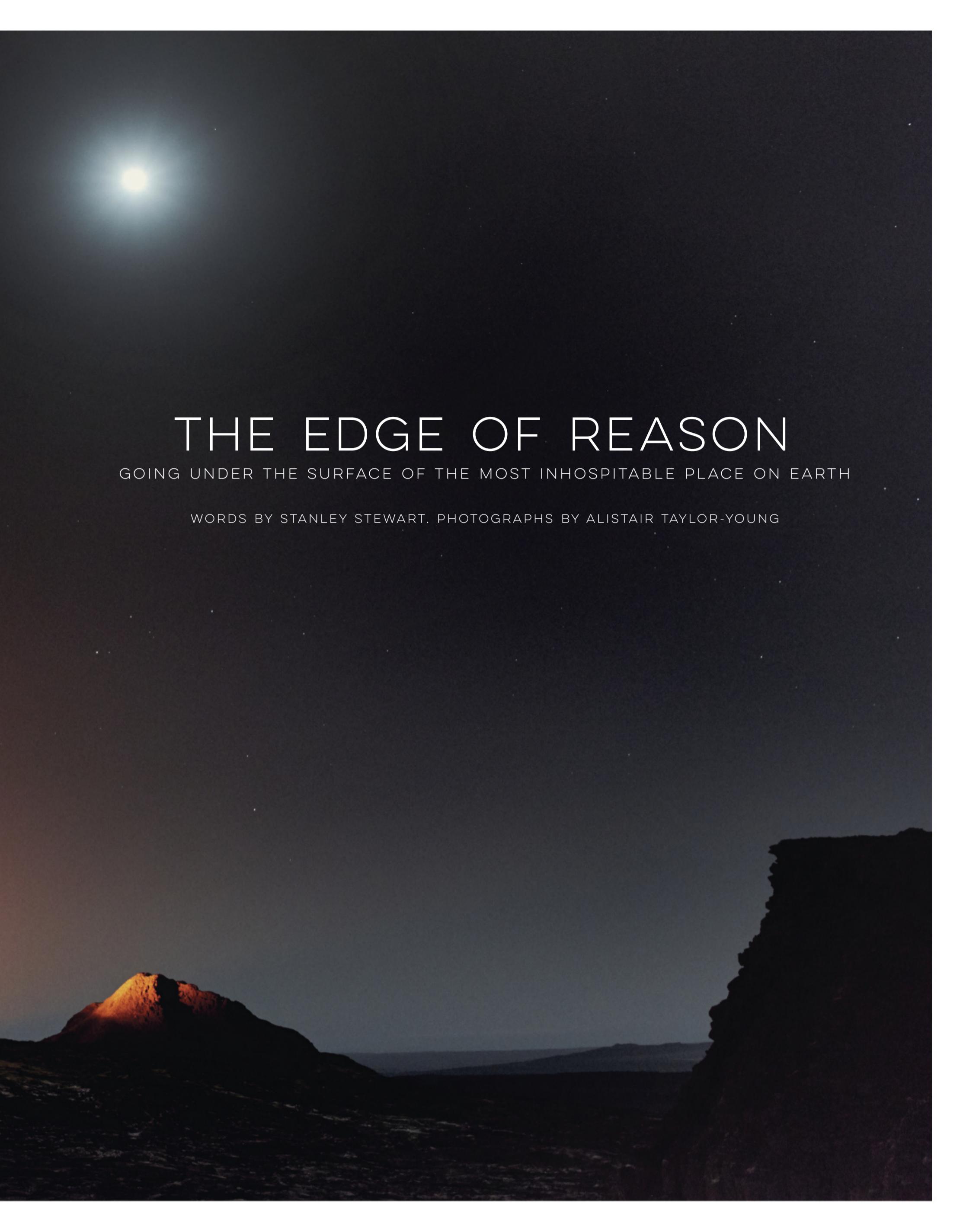
In this town, it's indisputably the rich squid-ink tagliatelle with prawns from the relaxed, cavernous Gagini Social Restaurant (35 Via dei Cassari; gaginirestaurant.com; around \$200 for two for dinner)—though the perfectly simple spaghetti aglio e olio dusted with tuna flakes from local favorite L'Ottava Nota is a very worthy runner-up. (55 Via Butera; ristoranteottavanota.it; about \$160 for two for dinner)

PERFECT COFFEE BREAK

Antico Caffè Spinnato is a dreamy, classic Italian coffee bar: old wood paneling, a Maserati of an espresso machine at the wall, veteran *barristi* in black vests and bow ties effortlessly controlling the crush of guests elbowing for space at the counter. Start with an eye-jolting macchiato and end with southern Italy's version of an ice cream sandwich, gelato in brioche. (107 Via Principe di Belmonte) ERIN FLORIO

Bellini Travel (bellinitravel.com) offers tailor-made trips to Palermo (founder Emily FitzRoy was even married here, so she really has the inside track). A five-night stay in a deluxe double at Villa Igziea, including a private visit to Palazzo Gangi, an after-hours tour of Monreale, and four days with a private guide, costs about \$5,700 per person





THE EDGE OF REASON

GOING UNDER THE SURFACE OF THE MOST INHOSPITABLE PLACE ON EARTH

WORDS BY STANLEY STEWART. PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALISTAIR TAYLOR-YOUNG

THE SALT MERCHANT DID HIS BEST to dissuade me. "You don't want to go there," he said. "It's hotter than hell, and they're quite likely to chop your testicles off." In the market in Mekele, in the Ethiopian highlands, the seller was seated among piles of rectangular salt blocks gift-wrapped in white acacia bark. "They come from the Danakil," he said. He must have noticed a glint in my eye. "Eight days by camel caravan. Don't even think about going there."

In the atlas of remote destinations, of splendidly end-of-the-world places, the Danakil is a star entry. It has been described as the lowest, the driest, the hottest, and the most inhospitable place on earth. Split between the northeastern fringes of Ethiopia, southern Eritrea, and northern Djibouti, it is stark, elemental, and spectacular. Much of it is 381 feet below sea level; temperatures regularly exceed 122 degrees. The Danakil is the kind of place to which myths attach. I have been thinking about visiting for more than 30 years.

Historical accounts of travel in the Danakil tend toward the hair-raising. A man called Ludovico Mariano Nesbitt explored the region in 1928. Three of his servants were murdered, but Nesbitt managed to get back, more or less intact, to deliver a lecture at London's Royal Geographical Society. Wilfred Thesiger was there

in 1930, after attending Haile Selassie's coronation. The great desert explorer loved the Danakil; it came with the kind of aloof and sadistic tribesmen—the Afar—who made him recall his prep-school days.

To say the Afar had a reputation for hostility may be understanding things. According to their code, a man was not a man if he had not killed other men. A chap without a few notches on his belt might be able to marry, but he had no hope of taking mistresses. Mealtime was stressful for the pacifists. They got the worst cuts of meat, and the others, Thesiger reports, would use them as human napkins, wiping "the grease and food off their hands on their clothes." As for outsiders, if the Afar didn't kill them, they usually castrated them. Apparently, they hung the dried scrotums from the rafters of their houses. One traveler reports seeing one used as a snuff pouch.

But the Afar have long since given up their antisocial habits of killing, castration, and carving the roast according to a man's police record. The murder rate is reportedly lower than in Milwaukee, which may not be entirely reassuring. Still, the Afar retain their reputation for aloofness. I blame the landscape. The Danakil is a harsh and demanding place. The Afar are its reflection.

Keen to see this dramatic region, and the storied salt trade that lies at its heart, I ignored the advice of the Mekele merchant and

THIS REGION IS STARK, ELEMENTAL, AND SPECTACULAR—A LAND TO WHICH MYTHS



set off with guides and porters in a couple of four-wheel drives. As we twisted downward from the Ethiopian highlands, canyons opened beneath us. The landscape became desiccated, and the vegetation thinned. Far below, the world was unraveling into vast horizontals.

We began to spot Afar encampments—round domed tents covered in brightly colored cloths and surrounded by corrals of thornbush containing camels and goats. Two young girls appeared near the road, their hair braided and shiny with camel butter. Around another bend, a man with a Kalashnikov slung over his shoulder was silhouetted against a white sky. At Berhale we found a scrum of belching trucks and bellowing beasts. The town is a key staging post of the salt trade. Some camel caravans still go all the way to the highlands with their cargo, but most, having come three days across the Danakil, off-load the salt onto trucks here. Laborers stacked blocks, and middlemen circled like vultures while the camels eyed us with a calculating gaze.

We drove on. Night fell. An hour or so later, we skirted the ramshackle settlement of Hamed Ela. Beyond it was our mobile camp, a surreal oasis of safari luxuries. Paraffin lanterns lit the way to tents with comfortable beds and flushing toilets. Warm showers sluiced away the desert dust. Cold beer emerged from an icebox. A candlelit dinner appeared, fillets of fish and sautéed vegetables

followed by chocolate mousse. The Danakil was proving more hospitable than anticipated.

No one comes to this place unattended. The Afar insist on accompanying their guests and charging them for the service. The local police chief had assigned us two armed guards, while the tribal chief, Hajji Hussein, had embedded a few men in key positions: tent-peg attendants, paraffin-lantern advisers, camp-chair inspectors.

In order to savor the sweet life of mattresses and pepper steak, Hajji had decided to come along himself. He presided over the camp followers like a minor potentate, sipping tea, dispensing orders, accepting bribes. We greeted one another each morning with elaborate salutations and were soon firm friends. He had four wives, 12 children, and more than 50 grandchildren—he wasn't sure of the latest count. When his mobile phone rang, I teased that it was one of the wives calling to check up on him. He wagged his finger. "Never," he advised, "give a wife your telephone number."

Ali, the chief guide, was less congenial. A tall, willowy young man, he wore a long robe with a curved dagger tucked into a wide

Dramatic rock formations in the Ethiopian desert.

Previous pages: The roiling lava of the Erta Ale volcano at night

ATTACH. HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF TRAVEL HERE TEND TOWARD THE HAIR-RAISING

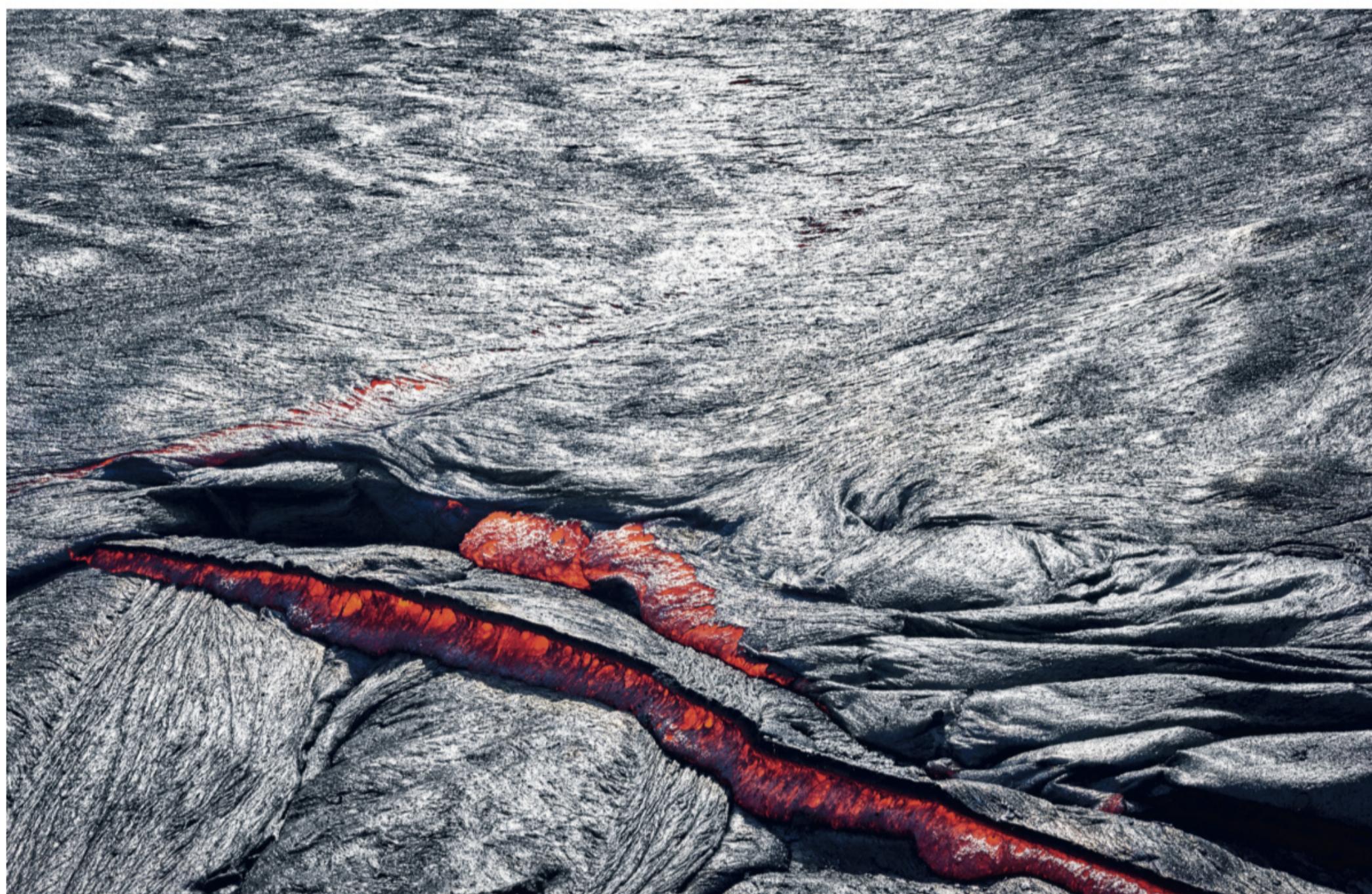


BEYOND THE DESERT MIRAGES—CAMELS KNEE-DEEP IN SILVER LAKES, CLUMPS OF



ILLUSORY TREES—WE CAME TO A PLACE WHERE THE WORLD WAS SPLITTING APART





leather belt. At his hip was a holstered revolver. His front teeth were sharpened to crocodile-like points: a rather unsettling beauty modification popular among the Afar. Efforts to engage him in casual conversation were met with stony monosyllables.

Hajji assigned Ali to guide us to Dallol. Beyond the desert mirages—camels knee-deep in silver lakes, clumps of illusory trees—we came to a troubled place where the world was splitting apart. A cauldron of tectonic and volcanic activity, the Danakil is the northernmost point of the Great Rift Valley, and the rift is still separating. One day soon, in another hundred million years or so, ocean water will flood this unstable desert, creating a new sea.

We clambered through a kind of Monument Valley where desolate mesas have been scoured by desert winds. We picked our way across a salt pan, the crust cracking like ice beneath our feet, to a sluggish lake of poisonous effluence. We climbed into an old caldera, fractured with fissures, faults, hot springs, and geysers, and stained with a kaleidoscope of mineral color. Stony fistulas had swollen and burst like boils, oozing caustic pus; small cones spat hot sulfur like open sores; bright green and yellow ponds bubbled ominously.

A few miles on, we came to the salt flats that were the center of one of Africa's most ancient trades. Up to a hundred men were cutting salt blocks in 104-degree heat and loading them onto camels. Once used as currency throughout the Horn of Africa and beyond, these bricks are called *amole tchew*. Egyptian writing from the sixth century described how they were bartered for gold.

The Afar rely on Tigrayans from the highlands to mine and transport the salt. These highlanders spend up to 10 months a year in the Danakil, living in the disheveled town of Hamed Ela, close to our

black lava fields where the vehicles stumbled and strained at a walking pace. At first we could see the fortress highlands of Tigray behind veils of haze. Then they were gone, and we were alone with the arid expanses, the mirages, the distant Afar tents hunkered down in the midday heat. Ahead, three volcanic cones appeared.

At the base of Erta Ale, the central of the three, we had some dinner, then loaded the camels and started the climb. Ali led the way, skipping over the lava rock like an ibex. I lengthened my stride to keep up. Our security men puffed along at the rear. The camels plodded after us, carrying mattresses and food. As the night deepened we became a single line of lights on the dark mountain. The climb began to feel like a pilgrimage, as if the hardship, the heat, the thirst might be a prelude to some revelation on the mountaintop.

Ali had not brought a water bottle—a curious oversight for an Afar. I shared mine. For a moment he was reluctant to accept, too proud to allow any sense of indebtedness. But eventually he relented. We sat side by side on the warm lava rock, drinking sparingly. We both panted in the night heat. “We say to share water is to be brothers,” he said after a time. We smiled at each other. “Come on,” he said. “We will never make it if we sit here like women.”

When we finally emerged on the rim, the porters unloaded the camels. Shortly after midnight we descended into the caldera and picked our way across the solidified lava flow to a smaller caldera set inside the first. Climbing its rim, we looked down into a seething lake of lava. Its fiery surface was in continual motion, churning like an agitated sea, the red and black veins sliding restlessly across one another. The heat was astonishing. Every few minutes a great boiling bubble of lava would swell and burst, sending more into the night

AS WE CLIMBED THE VOLCANO, IT BEGAN TO FEEL LIKE A PILGRIMAGE, AS IF THE HARDSHIP, THE HEAT, THE THIRST MIGHT BE A PRELUDE TO SOME REVELATION ON THE MOUNTAINTOP

camp. I had hoped for a raucous place full of brawling men, prostitutes, card sharks, opium dens, and lowlife dives. But in the evening, when I prevailed upon Ali to accompany me into town, I found a somnolent place where Coca-Cola seemed to be the tipple of choice and television the only entertainment. Ten hours working in blistering sun obviously didn't leave much energy for running amok.

Down in the dry riverbed of Hamed Ela, we found several dozen Tigrayan men waiting for the nightly lottery to begin. The complexities of the Afar fees and taxes on the salt trade make the derivatives market look like a model of clarity, and I won't pretend to understand them. But I was pleased to be given a starring role in establishing the priority bookings for the next day's camel caravans.

The lottery operates with camel sticks. The cameleers put their sticks in a pile, and an august figure—in this case, your correspondent, the celebrity guest—picks them out one by one. When his stick is chosen, each cameleer takes his spot in the line to pay the fees that ensure him a place in the next day's work.

Later I bought Ali a warm Coke in one of Hamed Ela's neon-lit bars. “Faranji,” Ali said. It was what he called all outsiders—faranji, foreigner. “We will need you every night now for the lottery. You are very good with the camel sticks.”

“I am available,” I said. “For a fee.”

“You are thinking like an Afar,” he said, offering a rare smile.

The following day we set off to one of the Danakil's greatest spectacles. Erta Ale—or “smoking mountain”—is a volcano whose caldera contains a permanent lava lake, a sea of liquid fire. We followed tracks southward through different desert stages: soft sand dunes, dry caked mud, gravel expanses with a thin covering of scrub,

air. It rained down as black sticky buds, already cooling to rock.

We both stared open-mouthed at this burning lake. Standing under the indifferent stars, I felt humbled, perhaps even a bit afraid, that our planet should show herself to be so disturbed, so terrifying. It seemed impossible to reconcile this hellfire with the earth I knew, a naive world of gentle breezes, spring rain, dappled sunlight. But this is what lay at its deepest heart—a fearsome burning.

“We will remember this place,” Ali said, his face glowing red in the light. Then he shook my hand, and we bumped shoulders in the Ethiopian fashion, as if signaling some pact between us.

The following day we took the road back up to Tigray, to trees and grass and cooling evenings. At a crossroads in the lower reaches of the pass, our Afar companions waited to catch a bus back to Hamed Ela. There were goodbyes and handshakes and the distribution of baksheesh. Hajji was waving from the roadside, sad to be leaving the foreigners with their ready access to ice-cold sodas.

Suddenly Ali leaned in at the window. “Faranji.” He took my hand. “You are a good traveler. You must come back.” It was high praise from the aloof man I'd met on arrival. “You never know,” he said, laughing, “we might need you for the camel-stick lottery.”

Will Jones of Journeys by Design (646-652-0489; journeysbydesign.com) is one of the only specialists leading trips into the Danakil. He offers 12 nights in Ethiopia, including a four-night stay in the Danakil in a private tented camp and a trek to Erta Ale, from \$8,950 per person. The price also includes charter flights, an English-speaking guide, and full-board lodging.

Opposite from top: Sulfur springs in the Danakil depression; red-hot lava oozes through the earth's crust at Erta Ale.

Previous pages: A camel herder leads his caravan into the salt flats of the Danakil depression



THE GLOBETROTTER KELLY SLATER

THE 11-TIME WORLD SURF CHAMPION IS THE YOUNGEST AND OLDEST PERSON TO HAVE WON A MEN'S TITLE

Where have you just come back from?

"Philadelphia and New Jersey. I'd never been before and was in south New Jersey to play golf at Pine Valley, one of the top golf clubs in the world. Driving around, you see a lot of small, run-down towns, and then you hit the amazing scenery of Pine Valley, which feels completely untouched."

Where in the world have you felt happiest?

"My favorite place is Hawaii. As a kid I looked at so many surf magazines and always imagined what it would be like to go there. When I was 12, I won a surf contest, and the prize was a trip to Hawaii. I went for the amateur championships and won. I made a bunch of lifelong friends I'm still really close with today. I've been going back for years, so it feels like home. It's incredibly beautiful, and it just makes me happy to be there. There are islands with almost every climate on earth. In the middle of winter you can snowboard, and on the same day you can surf. If you want to learn, go to Waikiki Beach, get longboards, and meet the beach boys who carry on the surfing tradition."

Name a place that lived up to the hype.

"I'd have to say Paris. It has so much rich history. I love how normal everyday people get to live in these gorgeous old buildings. It's almost like something out of a fairy tale. Because I'm always so locked into the surf in everyday life and when I travel, visiting somewhere like Paris is such a valuable cultural experience."

And one that least lived up to the hype?

"Los Angeles. Don't get me wrong, I love L.A. It has great food, a lot of my friends live there, and there are plenty of things to do. But the first time I flew into the city, I was just a kid, and I remember sitting at the window of the plane and descending through this layer of smog. I thought it was so dirty and gross—I didn't want to breathe the air when I landed. Then there's the traffic, which is just horrendous. You really do have to schedule your day around it. But there definitely is some good with the bad. Like, for example, the coastline. It's nice as you get out to Malibu."

Which is your favorite city, and why?

"Sydney. I like that it's on the coast; you can go from the city to surfing in 10 minutes. I love the outskirts, the Northern Beaches, where you can just escape. Drive in the right direction for half an hour and you won't even see a house."

Describe a view that never gets old.

"Inside a tube of water on a wave. Pipeline, a surf break in Hawaii, is great because it's so close to the beach that everyone can experience it with you on some level. When there's a really good one, the whole beach lights up and lets you know it."

Can you share a memory from a trip you took as a child?

"My mom's side of the family is from Maryland, so we used to go a lot when I was young. We loved it there; we'd visit every Christmas, and sometimes it would snow.

I USED TO COLLECT THE SILVERWARE FROM ROOM SERVICE. IT WAS MY THING. FOR A LONG TIME I HAD A MISHMASH OF CUTLERY"

We didn't get snow in Florida. I remember one time we were messing around, digging in the backyard, and we unearthed this ruby. It wasn't worth anything, but we thought we'd found a million dollars."

Describe a vacation disaster.

"I have them all the time, but one sticks out. Some friends and I were going to Cornwall for an event once. We flew into London and then traveled by road. My friend's boards fell off the truck and got run over. They were completely smashed, and we watched it happen!"

Tell us about a great little place you know.

"For my birthday a few years ago, I went up in the Pyrenees in France to Balnéa Spa, which is set on all these incredible hot springs. We drove for three hours to get there, and the route was really stunning."

Which is the most extraordinary hotel you've ever stayed in?

"I actually didn't stay there, but a friend of mine had booked into the Burj Al Arab Jumeirah in Dubai. It's on the water, and it's built to look like a giant sail. My friend had this incredible room, all the furniture was giant, like something out of Dr. Seuss. Everything was gold, and there was a tennis court on the roof."

Confess to one thing you've taken from a hotel room.

"I used to collect the silverware from room service—that used to be my thing. For a long time, I had this mishmash of cutlery. And then, you know, if I need a towel and a hotel has a really nice towel, then maybe I'll grab one."

I lost my heart in...

"Fiji—Tavarua Island. I fell in love with it when I was 18 and became close friends with the chief. He told me I could come to stay there whenever I wanted for as long as I wanted. It's literally a heart-shaped island with the perfect surf, and the people are the nicest in the world, so it's got everything going for it."

Who is the most interesting person you've met on your travels?

"I've been lucky enough to encounter such an array of people over the years. But the first person that springs to mind is Bill Murray. I've gotten to know him over the last decade or so, and he's really such an interesting guy. He's very intelligent, witty, and knowledgeable about a lot of different subjects. I met him at Pebble Beach, where we were both taking part in this golf tournament, and we've played golf many times since. He's surfed in the past too. In the 1980s, he went to Bali and was taught by these old legends. In fact, I recently spent a day with him in New York, playing golf and talking about our lives."

SHANNON MAHANTY

Kelly Slater stars in the documentary "Momentum Generation" alongside fellow surfers Rob Machado and Taylor Steele, available to stream on HBO

THE INSIDER ADDRESS ALILA YANGSHUO

RAZOR-SHARP ARCHITECTS RECONFIGURE CHINA'S MODERNIST PARAMETERS

An hour south of the well-worn paths of Guilin, against a dramatic backdrop of towering limestone peaks, deep-cut valleys, and fishing villages, is a disused sugar mill coiled into a tight curve of the Li River. Its owner had a vision to turn it into a private house, but the plans got too big, and too exciting. Seven years later, with the help of Alila, a rather extraordinary hotel has opened; the cluster of 1960s buildings has been rescued and revived by Beijing-based Vector Architects and interior firm Horizontal Space Design, with knockout results. A series of lofty public spaces and suites unravels over original brickwork and exposed beams, and an understated new main guest building slots seamlessly into its surroundings—an essay on concrete, softened by dark pools of water. Perforated cement screens cast dappled light onto a clean-lined, tactile interior of recycled timber and contemporary furniture, with low-slung leather benches from Shanghai-based Maxmarko and PINWU Studio's rice paper-and-beech bucket chairs. The art is staggering. An extensive collection—all Chinese, from every era, mixing traditional paintings and modern sculpture—wraps around the sunken reception and the restaurant. Perspex flooring covers the subtly lit old foundations, and Maoist motivational slogans painted on the exterior walls have been immaculately preserved. At a time when Chinese design is blowing our minds, here's a hotel that's expertly leading the way, with a stay that's like being part of an avant-garde installation. LAUREN HO Kings from about \$346. alilahotels.com



PHOTOGRAPH: SU SHENGLIANG/COURTESY OF VECTOR ARCHITECTS

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